The Impact of the Saemaul Undong (SMU) Model on Enhancing Community Leadership in Rural Cambodia: A Case Study in the Saemaul Undong (SMU)'s Participatory Approach in Three Provinces: Kampong Speu, Tboung Khmum, and Takeo

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Abstract
A recent study highlights the significant impact of South Korea's Saemaul Undong (SMU) model on rural Cambodia. Implemented in Kampong Speu, Tboung Khmum, and Takeo provinces, the SMU approach is effectively modernizing communities and strengthening community leadership, especially in the context of decentralization and post-conflict reconstruction.
The research, using a mixed-methods approach, found overwhelming community engagement, with nearly 99% of respondents wanting to continue participating. Statistical analysis revealed strong positive correlations between SMU training and key development indicators: women's leadership (r=0.896), community participation (r=0.862), and income generation (r=0.799). SMU Principle Training had the most substantial influence on these outcomes.
This study is groundbreaking as it's one of the first to empirically link SMU training with leadership development, particularly gender-inclusive leadership, in Cambodia. It suggests the SMU model could be integrated into national policy to promote sustainable rural development and good governance, offering a replicable model for other post-conflict or decentralized settings.

Keywords: Public Policy, Community Development, Local Leadership, Model Village, Saemaul Undong (SMU), Participatory Approach, Rural Development

1. Introduction

Cambodia has embraced decentralization to enhance governance and rural development, but local administrative units such as Commune/Sangkat Councils and village chiefs still face major obstacles in transparency, decision-making, and leadership. This study investigates how the SaemaulUndong (SMU) model—a South Korean rural development initiative emphasizing diligence, self-help, and cooperation—can strengthen leadership at the village level within Cambodia's decentralization framework.
Introduced in 2014 through a partnership between Cambodia's Ministry of Rural Development and KOICA, the SMU model has been piloted in 30 villages across Kampong Speu, Tboung Khmum, and Takeo provinces. The model aligns with national development strategies to promote rural resilience, leadership, and socio-economic progress.
Despite some success, such as increased civic participation, local leaders often lack the skills and resources needed for effective governance. Village Development Committees are largely inactive or reliant on village chiefs. This research evaluates whether SMU leadership training improves governance, with

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the hypothesis that trained leaders show greater effectiveness.

Employing a mixed-methods approach—interviews, focus groups, surveys, and literature review—the study finds that SMU-trained leaders have improved in planning, proposal writing, and engaging communities. However, challenges like limited training duration and funding restrict wider impact.

While the study is limited by sample size and short-term interventions, it offers key insights into leadership gaps and recommends expanding SMU-based training and integrating its principles into national rural development policies.

The conclusion emphasizes that institutionalizing SMU can enhance leadership, strengthen decentralization, and bridge the gap between government and communities.

2. Literature Reviews

2.1 Rural Development Policy: Saemaul Undong Development Model

The SaemaulUndong (SMU–New Village Movement) was created by the Park Government in 1970 to lift the nation's village from poverty and provide basic food crops for burgeoning urban populations (Douglass M. , 2013). The term "Saemaul" was coined by combining "Sae", which means "progressive renewal based on past experiences," and "Maul", which refers to "regional and social communities." Thus, SaemaulUndong represents a continuous effort towards community renewal and modernization for a better future (Kim K. R., 2018).

The basic project in SMU, which involved living condition improvement projects such as by removing thatched houses and paving roads, later developed into an income generation project (Undong, 2017). The success story of the SMU has been frequently referenced by Korean, as well as foreign, developmental economists and has compelled the Korea International Cooperation Agency and other international organizations, such as UN, to devote a substantial amount of resources into applying SMU experience to other countries (Jwa, 2018). This part aims to derive a theory of the SMU success by summarizing the new principles of economic development, which is the basic framework for analyzing the success factors of the SMU.

Economic models of discrimination can be divided into two classes: competitive and collective models. Competitive models study individual maximizing behavior that may include discrimination. In collective models, groups acts collectively against each other (Autor, 2003). Economic discrimination has long been recognized as a cause of income inequality among families and of wage inequality among workers. Discrimination in the labor market has been a particular concern because labor earnings are by far the most important source of the income that people can obtain from their own resources (Cain, 1984).

Discrimination in the labor market occurs when employers make decisions on wages and employment based on prejudices, such as race, gender, religion. It can lead to variations in wages for the same job and different employment rates (Pettinger, 2017).

Lessons learned from the SMU movement that may to some degree be successfully replicated elsewhere given appropriate adaptation include the following: (i) Infusing traditional societies with the attributes of diligence, self-help, and cooperation can facilitate social and economic transformation. (ii) Introducing male–female paired leadership in rural villages can empower women and facilitate transformation and modernization of traditionally gender-biased Asian societies. (iii) Provision of microfinance through institutions such as the Saemaul Bank (Village Bank) can effectively provide low-income communities with credit that can be used to leverage personal resources into investment that ultimately raises rural household incomes. (iv) Traditional cultural values and folkways can be of use in propelling socioeconomic change, given that they are appropriately revitalized, transformed, and modernized. (v) The top-down command-and-control approach to government involvement in CDD projects (community-driven development) should be avoided at all costs, as this negates empowerment of community communities. (vi)

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Quantitative monitoring and evaluation of results of CDD programs by government administrations should be avoided, as it likewise negates empowerment of community communities. (vii) Strong national political leadership with a commitment to sustainable CDD and empowerment of community communities can help facilitate socioeconomic transformation in Asian developing countries. (viii) CDD leaders must be carefully screened if abuse of administrative power that negates community community empowerment is to be avoided. (ix) There exists no standardized blueprint for CDD projects, as such an approach can likewise be at odds with empowerment of community communities (ADB, 2012).

Saemaul leaders at the village took responsibility of operating the village as a business. To operate this company of village, village leaders should be more than best farmers who have advanced technology and diligence. Best farmers could be considered as leaders of agriculture. However, during the SaemaulUndong, CEO of village business became the leader of the village company. These saemaul leaders became leaders or frontiers of broad development policy; they learned not only agricultural technology but social skills such as how to manage conflicts, how to lead meetings, and how to develop community development plans (Hwan, 2005). SaemaulUndong Training Institute was the primary agency responsible for education of Saemaul leaders and production of training materials. SMU began as a rather conventional integrated community development program with the aim of improving the physical environment of villages, introducing new attitudes and skills, and increasing incomes through small-scale self-help projects introduced by government agents and implemented through village cooperation (Reed, 2009).

In Mongolia, it dedicated itself to building a Saemaul Center (with karaoke), community well, bridge, chicken farm, green houses and planting trees. In the Philippines SMU helped to solve water problems, distribute pigs to households at no cost but with piglets expected to be given to other households after a year, teach Korean language and manners, and teach computer classes. In Vietnam attention has been given to animal husbandry, a health center, kindergarten and elementary school construction. In Timor-Leste, SMU projects include community center repair, school construction, farming tools, plumbing, and pig and chicken raising. In the Congo it has focused on land clearing for farming, crop seeds, and small farm management. The Russia SMU program presents an interesting departure from others by helping to invest in land in a maritime province of Russia to use North Korean labor to produce food for North Korea. The program includes teaching Korean to Korean Russians through a Korean brethren organization (Douglass M. , 2013).

It rapidly became a nation-wide program for rural development that by had spread to cities as a national symbol of the Korean way of government guided participatory development (Douglass M. , 2013). The success of SaemaulUndong bears global significance as well. A conventional theory argues that it is common for rural sector of a nation to become dependent on the urban sector in the process of development (Kim K. R., 2018).

As many regional development theories point out, the substantial stumbling block to the development of a remote area is not the lack of investment but a lack of revolutionary leadership. Actually, a training institute was opened in January 1972 with three goals: recruiting and training top-quality SaemaulUndong leaders, encouraging these leaders to engage in self-help program and contribute to the establishment of a beneficial system through diligence, self-help and cooperation (Reed, 2009). SaemaulUndong emphasizes growth by manifesting and enacting the people's desire to be free from the shackles of poverty and to join the ranks of well-to-do societies (Kim K. R., 2018). The existing studies on the SMU have so far been listing and emphasizing many elements of the Korea's SMU as the success factors; such elements include effective political leadership, efficient administrative arrangements, high

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quality of the SMU leadership (including female leaders), traditional convention of cooperation in rural villages, ideological reform, Saemaul education, community participation, and community-driven development (Jwa, 2019).

UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon also said that developing countries are paying keen attention to the usefulness of SaemaulUndong as a development model. SaemaulUndong has a huge meaning as the Korea's model of development cooperation. Kim Young-mok, President of KOICA, said that SMU is a comprehensive development that can contribute to international community's drive toward inclusive growth. SMU gives us tools to create social and economic values that directly benefit people and can be shared with the international community. It was SMU that laid the foundation for Korea to achieve modernization and development. It is time for us to develop SMU into a new multi-faceted development model to tackle issues in health, education, gender and human rights in a comprehensive manner. This can be achieved by combining the principles of SMU with our cutting-edge technologies in agriculture, energy and environment.

Rural Saemaul Undong was implemented with villages as its unit, led by a Saemaul leader and a female leader. In this regard, it can be inferred that the success of rural Saemaul Undong has hinged on the competence of the Saemaul leaders in the individual villages. Since the Saemaul leaders played a crucial role in the success of Saemual, their education and training was of equal importance.

Saemaul Undong Development Model is one of the rural development models with the situational context of all parts related to the rural development policy, decentralization, and agricultural sector. The UNDP, in its "Saemaul Initiative Towards Inclusive and Sustainable New Communities Implementation Guidance," draws on the SMU's experience as a case study for identifying proven approaches and policy options for inclusive and sustainable local development. Some of their rural development reports mention SaemaulUndong as a model for community-driven development (UNDP, 2015).The SaemaulUndong program is considered a success story due to its reliance on community participation, where villagers provided labor and resources alongside government support and funding for various development projects like infrastructure and education (Kwon H.-j. , 2010). SaemaulUndong as a Mechanism for Social Inclusion (Kwon H.-j. , Implications of Korea's Saemaul Undong for Development Policy: A Structural Perspective, 2010). The World Bank has also recognized the SMU as a model. For example, the World Bank's newsletter mentioned the program's performance-based approach, emphasizing the importance of linking local government with community-driven initiatives and developing training programs based on SMU principles, as highlighted in the newsletter (Bank W. , 2016).

Therefore, it is very difficult to define Saemaul Undong due to the constant changes in its scope and agenda. If one focuses exclusively on activities performed in rural areas from 1970 to 1979, however, it is possible to find some common denominators shared throughout the entire movement. In short, Saemaul Undong was a community-based integrated rural development programme. As each Government of a developing country names its development programmes in its own way, Saemaul Undong was a brand name given by the Government of the Republic of Korea (Park, 2009).

2.2 Theory of Leadership in SMU Model

The sentence on the Saemaul Undong (SMU) Model aligns with various academic sources discussion the movement but the exploration of leadership has evolved from a singular leadership figure (Table 1) to the qualities and evolutionary principles involved in the formation of leadership (Hunt, Fedynich , 2019). Albert S King identifies nine evolutionary eras with researchers in each era focusing on a specific theme of leadership together different approaches in developing a sustainable theory of leadership (King, 1990).

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A study by Park (2012) explains the SMU's impact on narrowing the development gap between urban and rural areas in South Korea by promoting opportunities and facilitating empowerment for the people (Park, 2012). Furthermore, Doucette and Muller (2016) provide a critical intervention into South Korea's efforts to promote the SaemaulUndong as a model of international development assistance, emphasizing its core principles and success (Jamie Doucette, A. Muller , 2016).

2.3 Application of SMU in Cambodia

SaemaulUndong (SMU) is known as Korea's community-based integrated rural development movement as the driving force behind Korea's rapid socio-economic development and modernization. This model has succeeded in the Korea's community development by drawing individuals' active voluntary participations and collective decisions in developing their community communities. The Kingdom of Royal Cambodia proposed to the Republic of Korea (ROK) through the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) in the flagship form of Korea's rural development program, SaemaulUndong (SMU) was officially known in Cambodia in the late February 2014 (MRD, SMU Master Plan, 2017).

The SMU model combines both top-down and bottom-up approaches. The central government provides overall guidelines and directions, while community governments act as intermediaries to connect village voices with the central government. The SMU model emphasizes the active participation of rural villagers. Villagers contribute to their development goals through labor, cash, land, and materials. This participation is pivotal for the successful implementation of community projects (LWD, End-Line Survey Report, 2018).

Due to its significance, in February 2014, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) and Cambodian Ministry of Rural Development agreed to sign Record of Discussions on 'Self-Supporting Rural Development Project with SaemaulUndong's Participatory Approach' project at the Ministry of Rural Development in Cambodia. It was piloted in 30 villages in the three provinces. The SMU project was implemented in 4 years from 2015 to 2018. The implementing agency of the project is the consortium of Kangwon National University, Global Agro, and Yonsei University of South Korea (LWD, End-Line Survey Report, 2018). The budget plan for SMU in Cambodia in 48 months was USD 8,950,000 and was used for three main project sites: (a) project site of Strategic Policy Consulting covers the whole Cambodia; (b) SMU's Training Center project site (Cambodia-Korea Rural Development Center-CKRDC); (c) SMU's 30 pilot villages (DIGNITY, 2015).

The Record of Discussions was officially signed by H.E. Suos Kong, Secretary of State of the Ministry of Rural Development (MRD), and Ms. Baek Sook Hee, Representative of the KOICA Cambodia Office, in the distinguished presence of H.E. CheaSophara, Minister of Rural Development, and H.E. Kim Han Soo, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Cambodia. The signing ceremony was also attended by KOICA delegates and senior officials from MRD.This project is primarily designed to:

1. Promote a community-based integrated rural development model that encourages voluntary participation and collective decision-making among villagers for sustainable rural development in Cambodia;
2. Institutionalize capacity development at all levels—ranging from the central government to village-level committees—by disseminating the SaemaulUndong (SMU) principles of diligence, self-help, and cooperation; and
3. Establish a strong foundation for the nationwide expansion of the SMU model by ensuring the successful implementation of 30 pilot projects focused on income generation, environmental improvement, and community empowerment.

The project has been carried out for a period of five years (2014-2018) based on the

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Framework Arrangement on Grant Aid for the year 2014. The intensive SMU activities that are divided into three categories: (1) Strategic Policy Consulting and Master-planning, (2) Capacity Development of government officials and villagers and (3) Pilot Projects at 30 villages. As planned, the project outputs will include (1) SMU Master Plan, (2) Establishment of SMU Training Center (Feasibility Study on the Establishment of Hun Sen SaemualUndong University in Cambodia in 2015), (3) Development of Education Curriculums and Training Materials, (4) Community Training Program, (5) Invitational Training Program, and (5) Pilot Project for income generation, environment improvement and spiritual reform. There are fewer responsibilities in the roles and duties of village chief in leadership, stating in the requirement in selection of village chief. The village chief is selected to be responsible for managing the whole village. Village chief has no power to decide to resolve any problem in the Commune Council's authorities without delegation from Commune/Sangkat Council. (DIGNITY, 2015). Village chief, vice-chief and village member have to make a meeting at least one time a month and communication with people (Interior Ministry, 2006). But most of the roles and duties stated in the requirement to select the management of the village are not detailed about skill and knowledge (DIGNITY, 2015).

For the project of "Self Supporting Rural Development Project with SaemaulUndong (SMU)'s Participatory Approach in Cambodia" that is implemented by the Ministry of Rural Development under the support of KOICA, leadership and skills in Rural Development are really important (MRD, Seminar , 2015). How to lead people is what the government defined Saemaul leaders as active workers who would play a crucial role, including triggering, protecting and maintaining meaningful changes for the community and gave systematic and continuous support for their development. (Han, 2012). Training of Saemaul leaders is centered on boosting morale, guaranteeing their leadership status, and enhancing their capacities. Difficulties for these leaders and conflicts between villages were resolved in systematic ways (Undong, 2017).

Village is a place that is located with many houses, households and people. Many villages make a Commune or Sangkat. Village is a non-administration unit and is not stated in the Nation Constitution of Cambodia. Each village must have one chief, vice-chief and one member who is regarded as an assistant (Interior Ministry, 2006). The research will find the village leaders or Saemaul leaders who can serve five basic roles: (i) create and coordinate needs, (ii) motivate resident participation, (iii) suggest solutions and lead by example, (iv) mobilize and utilize resources, (v) and create conditions and environment favorable to development.

They are chosen for their decisiveness and leadership ability and are expected to complement or even surpass the performance and contribution of existing regional leaders (Kim K. R., Handbook of Village Development, 2018). In SMU movement, when asked why they decided to become leaders, 68% of Saemaul leaders answered that they decided to take on a leadership role because they wanted to help their home villages become prosperous. Compared to the other answer, such as "I took the role for my personal interest, desire to be in control, or ambition (11%)," "I wanted to quit , but the public servant pushed me to continue (8%)," "I didn't want to do it, but I couldn't resist the strong recommendations of residents (5%)," the above answer of the majority of Saemaul leaders clearly illustrates their commitment to helping people overcome poverty and devotion to the modernization of their country (Undong, 2017). Development Effectiveness Awareness Survey Result is very important and useful because the survey is used to measure the development effectiveness recognized by community residents who are the beneficiaryof the community development, as well as the owner of the project(Dignity, 2018). Although many community leaders in the SMU target villages claimed to be confident of their own capacity and able to work with minimum support from outsiders,

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some key areas of weakness were identified. Village leaders, the village committee members and VDC, lack clear roles and job description.

As the strategies of SMU in Korea, government provided free cement in the first two years to villages for developing their living environment as a pilot project. With this cement, villagers set up project plans through village meeting, and participated in planned activities such as constructing a road into or in the village, building outdoor laundry facilities, changing the thatched roofs, etc.

Through the village meeting, they also chose one male and one female SMU leaders whose leadership played primary roles in the success of rural SMU. Each village's performance was evaluated and additional supports were given to villages that showed active participation of villagers. Advanced or pilot villages were created through this process and worked as models for future extension. In this model, government's direct investment was limited to proving some material but output return to the village was two or three times larger than that.

Therefore, the SMU model in Cambodia effectively enhances community leadership by improving self-empowerment and fostering a participatory environment. However, its economic impact is limited, and the benefits are not evenly distributed across all community members. Active participation and integration of both top-down and bottom-up approaches are critical for the model's success in enhancing community leadership.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Methodological Considerations

The study explores whether Korea's SaemaulUndong (SMU) leadership theory is applicable to Cambodian village-level leadership, especially within the context of Cambodia's existing decentralization reforms.The research adopts an input-output model to compare Korean and Cambodian systems, treating community leadership as the output of strategic development processes.It incorporates elements from geopolitics, education, economics, and leadership theories and identifies community leaders as intervening variables linking decentralization and SMU principles.

3.2 Research Design

his study used a descriptive research design combining quantitative and qualitative methods to assess the impact of the SMU model on community leadership in Cambodia. Data were collected from 12 SMU pilot villages across Kampong Speu, Takeo, and TboungKhmum provinces, along with the Cambodia-Korea Rural Development Center (CKRDC).The research was conducted in two phases:Interviews with villagers from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, In-depth interviews with village leaders. The process followed a clear flow: identifying the research problem, reviewing literature, formulating hypotheses, conducting a pilot study, collecting data, and performing analysis.

3.3 Sample Size

The study on the application of the SaemaulUndong (SMU) leadership model in Cambodia involved 161 participants, including 36 village leaders, 108 villagers, and 17 government officials from the Cambodia-Korea Rural Development Center (CKRDC). Participants were selected to capture diverse perspectives from community and institutional stakeholders. Villages were categorized into three performance tiers—excellent (3 villages), very good (4), and good (5)—to facilitate comparative analysis of leadership effectiveness and community engagement across different implementation outcomes. This categorization ensured a balanced representation of SMU pilot villages.

3.4 Sample Method

The study assessing the application of the SaemaulUndong (SMU) model in Cambodia used a combined sampling strategy to ensure representative and diverse data. **Quota sampling** was applied to include individuals from different leadership roles and socio-economic backgrounds, focusing on key subgroups such as village leaders and various

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household types. **Cluster sampling** was used to select villages based on geographic and administrative divisions. Villages were chosen using KOICA's 2018 project evaluation, which categorized SMU villages by performance indicators like income generation and leadership. A total of **12 villages** were selected—3 each from TboungKhmum and Takeo, and 6 from Kampong Speu—providing a balanced and comparative basis to analyze the varying impacts of SMU implementation across provinces.

3.5 Research Techniques

The research used a mixed-methods approach by combining primary and secondary data to examine community leadership under the SaemaulUndong (SMU) model in Cambodia. Secondary sources such as literature, government reports, and strategic plans provided background and shaped the methodology. Primary data were collected through structured personal, focused, and group interviews with community stakeholders. Trained staff from the Cambodia-Korea Rural Development Center (CKRDC) conducted the fieldwork using structured questionnaires with both open- and closed-ended questions. This comprehensive approach ensured reliable, in-depth findings on leadership and community dynamics.

3.6 Data Collection

In this study on the application of the SaemaulUndong (SMU) model in Cambodia, data collection was carried out using both **secondary** and **primary sources**, ensuring a comprehensive and balanced understanding of rural leadership dynamics and community development.Secondary Data Collection.Throughout the data collection process, **confidentiality and informed consent** were strictly observed. Respondents were fully briefed on the study's purpose, and ethical measures were taken to ensure their privacy and data security.This multi-layered approach to data collection provided a rich and reliable dataset to evaluate the effectiveness of the SMU leadership model and its potential for broader application in Cambodia's rural development strategies.

3.7 Data Analysis

The study's data were thoroughly analyzed using SPSS software through several steps, including editing, coding, tabulation, and statistical techniques such as descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analysis, as well as regression modeling. A key feature of the analysis was the use of a path model to examine how the independent variable (training in SaemaulUndong principles) affected the dependent variable (development outcomes) through an intervening variable (community leadership).

Statistical equations were applied under standard assumptions—such as normal distribution and unbiased estimation—to validate the hypothesized relationships. SPSS ensured methodological rigor throughout the process.Data quality was carefully monitored, with only minor issues in question wording that did not affect the study's reliability. Ethical standards were strictly followed, including informed consent and confidentiality, with participant identities protected through anonymized codes.

4: Results

4.1 People's participation

The research highlights community participation as a key response to the research question, with community leadership efficacy at the village/commune level in Cambodia as the primary dependent variable. Data analysis from 30 SMU villages shows a significant increase in participation through the SaemaulUndong (SMU) model. Labor contributions rose from 21.9% at baseline to 63.5%, and monetary contributions reached 90.1%. Around 94.2% of community members took part in road construction within villages, 62% in community hall or pagoda repairs, and 48.6% in main road works.Interviews reveal that 98.9% of respondents participate in village activities and show interest in continuing with the project, while 87% are actively engaged. Participation focuses on infrastructure development such as roads, temples, and irrigation systems, with temple

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repair highlighting religion as a community unifier.The SMU model emphasizes collective action and self-reliance. Women's participation has notably increased, with 75% showing improved engagement in social services, especially in sanitation, hygiene, and environmental activities. However, men remain more active overall. Women's participation spans development (77.4%), leadership (27.4%), general social activities (7.1%), and full involvement in all activities (10.7%).

4.2 Development awareness

The study found a marginal overall improvement in community awareness of development effectiveness across all areas, with notable positive perceptions of the project's efficiency and effectiveness. The newly measured perception of social capital scored 4.67, exceeding the overall average of 4.60. While awareness of effectiveness, efficiency, and gender equality increased, there were no statistically significant changes regarding sustainability and impact.Causal analysis was conducted to understand these awareness changes, and its insights will inform post-project management for improved outcomes. Among the provinces, Takeo showed the most positive results, particularly in gender equality, while Kampong Speu had the lowest overall scores and even a decline in perceived impact. TboungKhmum showed minimal change over the last two project years. Despite some negative item-specific shifts, none were statistically significant. A comparative study between Kampong Speu and Takeo is recommended, especially concerning the contrasting results on impact awareness.

The perception of development effectiveness in Kampong Speu increased from 4.28 to 4.52 (a 0.24-point rise), showing overall positive growth across evaluation items. However, a negative result was observed in the "impact" category, suggesting a need for causal analysis related to project transparency and beneficiary selection. Despite improvement, Kampong Speu still ranks lower in awareness compared to the other two provinces.In Takeo, the effectiveness perception rose from 4.49 to 4.71 (a 0.22-point increase). All indicators showed slight improvement, with gender equality perception improving the most. Residents showed strong recognition of project impacts and changes, particularly in effectiveness and efficiency, surpassing the other provinces. Tboung Khmum saw a modest rise in development awareness by only 0.08 points, with individual item scores changing marginally (0.02–0.16 points). Perception of project sustainability remained nearly unchanged (4.41 to 4.39). A deeper analysis is needed to strengthen future project management.Community participation in development activities was notable:Labor contribution: 36%, Cash contributions: 31%, In-kind contributions: 31%Other: 2% Takeo had the highest labor contribution (9/10 villages), while TboungKhmum led in in-kind support.The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) plans to maintain project operations beyond 2019. Villagers support continuation due to positive outcomes, knowledge gains, existing guidelines, and established village funds—offering a solid foundation for sustaining the SaemaulUndong (SMU) approach.

4.3 Development effectiveness

Most people, including village chiefs and commune councilors, seemed to be unaware of the term SMU that is very common in many projects implemented in Cambodia. In contrast, communities remember their practices and their activities rather than the term SMU. "SMU" is not a theory or concept that people need to remember, but the villagers remembered their actions and their practices in the project well. The people in these provinces believe that the poor are given a priority when the project is implemented in the villages while villagers' needs were well reflected on the project selection. Participants also believe that Korean experts' activities were supportive while the MRD-PDRD SMU officials' activities were helpful to implemented in the villages.

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4.4 Achievement of planned targets

The project achieved high success rates in key areas such as income generation, community activities, and spiritual development. Participant perceptions aligned with improved ID poor classifications—ID Poor 1 decreased from 10.3% to 5.4%, although ID Poor 2 slightly increased. A significant portion of participants (64.3%) now consider themselves middle-income earners, and 21% report being high-income. Despite progress, some households still experience food shortages. Agricultural income has grown, and increased spending on food and education indicates rising living standards.Infrastructure needs, particularly for sanitation, remain a concern in densely populated villages. Overall, the project was effectively implemented across targeted provinces, benefiting 30 villages with timely activities and appropriate training delivered by CKRDC.

The project's master plan introduced model villages and SMU pilot projects based on four strategies: bottom-up government-led approach, comprehensive scope, strong village leadership, and inter-village competition. Of the 30 model villages, 13 were recognized for outstanding performance—five rated "Excellent" and eight "Very Good."Monitoring and evaluation confirmed improvements in quality of life using Human Development Index (HDI) comparisons. The project successfully fostered a Self-Reliant Village Model, with measurable outputs including increased rural income, enhanced living conditions, stronger capacity, and institutionalization of SMU. SMU values such as cooperation and diligence became visible across communities, along with notable improvements in hygiene and public infrastructure.

4.5 Living environment improvement

The community has shown strong interest in continuing the practices of the SaemaulUndong (SMU) model even after the project concludes. A key factor in the project's sustainability is the shift in community mindset toward self-reliance and improved behavior. To enhance income generation, there is a need to develop cottage industries and strengthen farmer cooperatives by linking them to the value chain.

Significant household-level changes include the adoption of improved farming and livestock practices, better access to clean water and irrigation, increased income, enhanced health and sanitation (e.g., toilet installations), and upgraded infrastructure such as roads with proper drainage. Social changes were also observed, including reduced alcohol consumption, increased savings, self-help behaviors, community engagement, and strengthened solidarity. Sharing SMU lessons with other institutions like the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) is recommended to gain broader support and impact.

4.6 Trust on leaders' capacity

The awareness and perception of the interviewees about the SMU project were found to be higher. The level of trust on village leaders' capacity and the perception of the women's leadership roles were found higher too. During the research study, it recognized that many community leaders in the SMU target villages have confidence of their capacity and are able to work with minimum support from outsides. The study shows that there is an increase on the perception of the community members on the capability of their village leaders. The numbers of interviewees who believe that the capability of their village leaders is high has increased to 70.2 percent (6.5 % higher from the baseline, which is 63.7 %).50% of the interviewees believe that village leaders were able to work independently with little support. There are still 38 % of interviewees believing that the village leaders have limited capacity.

4.7 Perception of women's roles in villages

95.2 % of the interviewees totally support women taking leadership role in the village and 3.6 % who are undecided. The percentage is almost the same with the baseline survey. The baseline survey also indicates that 95.6 % of the community members totally support the women taking active leadership role in the

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community. 1.7% do not support. There is higher number of women who participated in SMU activities. The awareness and perception of the respondents about the SMU project was observed to be high.

4.8 Result of Saemaul Undong training

To enhance community development efforts in Cambodia, the Cambodia-Korea Rural Development Center (CKRDC), with support from KOICA and the Korea SaemaulUndong Academy, initiated extensive training programs emphasizing Saemaul leadership principles, mindset transformation, and rural development skills. A key milestone was a two-week training in Korea (March–April 2017), where 10 CKRDC staff received training in leadership development and sustainable rural strategies. The training integrated theory, field visits, and group discussions aimed at managing CKRDC and designing impactful community training.

The training emphasized:

- Saemaul values of Self-help, Diligence, and Cooperation
- Mindset change and behavior transformation
- Leadership development for village and commune leaders
- Technical farming skills and income generation strategies
- Practical knowledge application and community engagement

Following the Korean training, CKRDC implemented 42 training sessions under the *Self-Supporting Rural Development Project with SMU's Participatory Approach*, training 866 participants including government officials, community leaders, and villagers from provinces such as TboungKhmum, Kampong Speu, and Takeo.

A survey of 161 trainees revealed:

- 62.87% acknowledged CKRDC's role in human resource development through leadership and agricultural skills.
- 78.20% reported mindset changes; 65.46% had implemented action plans (e.g., farming, small businesses).
- 84.74% were satisfied with the training, noting practical benefits in daily life and increased income.
- Positive behavioral changes included: early rising, exercising, quitting smoking/drinking, and environmental cleanliness.
- Trainees valued women's participation and embraced the SMU spirit.

The training program incorporated:

- Daily schedules from 5:30 AM to 10:00 PM combining lectures, fieldwork, and personal development.
- A curriculum structure: 25% Mindset Change, 25% Leadership Development, and 50% Rural Development, covering subjects like agriculture techniques, food processing, gender empowerment, and income generation.
- Educational outcomes improved significantly, with test scores rising from 58.19 to 90.15 points.

Since the project's handover in 2018, CKRDC has conducted 67 training courses (48 short, 18 medium) for 1,654 trainees (562 women) across 15 provinces, expanding its impact beyond the original three target provinces. CKRDC continues to focus on blending theoretical education with hands-on practice to ensure sustainable livelihood improvements and broader rural development in Cambodia.

Result of SMU Training in Cambodia by MRD: Creating the basis for increasing income which related to village projects on the made training programs:

- With training around income items of modeled villages, creating the basis for increasing income related to village projects.
- Operating with training programs related directly to income. Developing the teaching materials and lectures met the level of villagers' skill, not around consciousness reforming.
- Besides theory lecturing, training programs as site practice, field study, case presentation and group discussion, were concentrated on the theme by item, and it has helped to develop trainees' capability.
- Preparation of progress basis with cultivating of community consciousness and

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confidence:

- Understanding the Saemaul Spirit and the necessity of community consciousness, and recognizing certainly the sense of mission and role of village leaders and officials who are in charge of it for community developing, an opportunity of jointing the progress between leader's groups was prepared. Such project progress system will work on main power source for the village community projects in future.
- Finally, when income was increased, they have interesting on the community movement and participate in the movement. After learning about improvement of troubles and farming skills of income items, and then after returned home, they could build the action plan that is a virtual guide for income projects.
- Not only by cultivating the Saemaul Spirit but also by having a strong challenging spirit and confidence on the Cambodia conditions, it becomes to prepare a progress basis of village development projects for increase of income and self-helping.
- Reinforcing the co-operating system with MRD of Cambodian Government.

4.9 Result of Correlation Analysis and Regressions

The study tested both alternative and null hypotheses to address the core research question through correlation analysis using data from 12 villages. It examined the relationships among four key variables: SMU Principle Training, Income Generation, Women's Leadership, and Community Participation. The independent variables were Knowledge Gain, SMU Principle Training, and SMU Application, with Community Participation as the dependent variable.

Results revealed strong positive and statistically significant correlations:

- SMU Principle Training and Income Generation ($r = 0.799$, $p = 0.000$),
- SMU Principle Training and Women's Leadership ($r = 0.896$),
- SMU Principle Training and Community Participation ($r = 0.862$).

All variables were positively correlated, with the strongest link found between SMU Principle Training and Women's Leadership, suggesting that enhanced training is closely associated with increased female leadership in the community (See Table 1).

Table1: Correlation Analysis

		SMU Principle Training	Income Generation	Women Leadership	Community Participation
SMU Principle Training	Pearson Correlation	1	.799**	.896**	.862**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	161	161	161	161
Income Generation	Pearson Correlation	.799**	1	.786**	.858**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	161	161	161	161
Women Leadership	Pearson Correlation	.896**	.786**	1	.849**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	161	161	161	161
Community Participation	Pearson Correlation	.862**	.858**	.849**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	161	161	161	161

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

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The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. The p-values (labeled "Sig. (2-tailed)") test the **null hypothesis** that the correlation is zero (no correlation). A p-value less than 0.05 (and very close to 0) generally indicates that the correlation is statistically significant. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), meaning there is less than a 1% chance that this correlation is due to random chance. All the variables in the table are positively correlated with one another, and these correlations are statistically significant. Similarly, strong relationships are observed among all other pairs of variables, suggesting they are likely interconnected in the context of the study.

As the result of correlation analysis of SaemaulUndong principle training and the village leaders' efficacy with 161 respondents was found to be highly positive and statistically significant (r=.799, r=.896, r=862, p<.001). This shows that an increase in SaemaulUndong Training would lead a significant increase in leaders' efficacy in villages because the **alternative hypothesis ($H1_a$)** was supported and the p-values test the **null hypothesis ($H1_0$)**that the correlation is no correlation.

Another correlation analysis between four variables: Community Participation, SMU Application, SMU Principle Training, Knowledge gain with 161 respondentswas found to be highly positive and statistically significant: (r=.865, r=.862, r=.856, Sig (p<.001)(Table 2).

All correlations in the table have a p-value of 0.000, which means they are statistically significant.Community Participation is strongly correlated with all other variables, indicating that as any of these variables increase, Community Participation tends to increase as well.

All variables are positively correlated with each other, and these correlations are statistically significant. Community Participation is strongly correlated with all other variables, indicating that (SMU Application, SMU Principle Training, and Knowledge Gain) increase, Community Participation tends to increase as well. Therefore, there are strong correlations among the other variables, suggesting that these variables are related and likely influence each other.

Table2: Pearson Correlation

		Community Participation	SMU Application	SMU Principle Training	Knowledge Gain
Pearson Correlation	Community Participation	1.000	.865	.862	.856
	SMU Application	.865	1.000	.798	.836
	SMU Principle Training	.862	.798	1.000	.815
	Knowledge Gain	.856	.836	.815	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	Community Participation	.	.000	.000	.000
	SMU Application	.000	.	.000	.000
	SMU Principle Training	.000	.000	.	.000
	Knowledge Gain	.000	.000	.000	.
N	Community Participation	161	161	161	161
	SMU Application	161	161	161	161
	SMU Principle Training	161	161	161	161
	Knowledge Gain	161	161	161	161

ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) is used in the context of regression analysis to determine whether the independent variables in the model collectively have a statistically significant effect on the dependent variable. ANOVA helps to determine if the regression

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model as a whole is significant.p-value = 0.000 tests the null hypothesis that the regression model does not explain any of the variance in the dependent variable. Since the p-value is less than 0.05 (and very close to 0). The ANOVA table, (Sig.= .000[b]) means that all the independent variables are significantly contributing in prediction of dependent variables (See Table 3).

Therefore, the ANOVA table shows that the regression model is statistically significant (p-value = 0.000), meaning that the independent variables significantly explain the variance in Community Participation. It indicates that the regression model is statistically significant, meaning that the independent variables (Knowledge Gain, SMU Principle Training, SMU Application) collectively have a significant effect on the dependent variable (Community Participation).

Table3: ANOVA[s]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	177.335	3	59.112	287.277	.000[b]
	Residual	32.305	157	.206		
	Total	209.640	160			

a. Dependent Variable: Community Participation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge Gain, SMU Principle Training, SMU Application

The coefficients of a multiple regression model detail the relationship between each predictor variable and the dependent variable (Community Participation). In the coefficients of multiple regressions, output shows that the population regression intercepts are positive impact on the dependent variable (.518, .515, .400). (Constant) B = -1.860: This is the intercept, which is the expected value of Community Participation when all predictors are equal to zero.SMU Application B = 0.518: For every one-unit increase in SMU Application, Community Participation is expected to increase by 0.518 units, holding all other variables constant.SMU Principle Training B = 0.515: For every one-unit increase in SMU Principle Training, Community Participation is expected to increase by 0.515 units, holding other variables constant.Knowledge Gain B = 0.400: For every one-unit increase in Knowledge Gain, Community Participation is expected to increase by 0.400 units, holding other variables constant.

This table shows that all the predictors—SMU Application, SMU Principle Training, and Knowledge Gain—significantly contribute to the prediction of Community Participation. The coefficients suggest that SMU Principle Training has the strongest standardized effect, followed by SMU Application and then Knowledge Gain. All the relationships are positive, meaning increases in any of SMU Application, SMU Principle Training, and Knowledge are associated with increases in Community Participation (See Table 4).

Table4: Multiple Regression Output

Coefficients[a]								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	-1.860	.197		-9.421	.000	-2.251	-1.470
	SMU Application	.518	.091	.351	5.707	.000	.339	.697
	SMU Principle Training	.515	.081	.369	6.347	.000	.355	.676
	Knowledge Gain	.400	.097	.262	4.108	.000	.208	.592
a. Dependent Variable: Community Participation								

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As in the model summary output for multiple regression (R=920[a]), it means that the more principle of SaemaulUndong approach would be trained, the more community participation increases(See Table 5).

In the regression, Gaining knowledge, SMU Principle Training, SMU Application are used to predict the efficacy of leadership among village leaders. The value of R-square (.846) is high. It means that it can be explained by all independent variables for a dependent variable for the hypothesis of the study.

Table 5: Model Summary Output for Multiple Regressions

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.920[a]	.846	.843	.45361
a. Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge Gain, SMU Principle Training, SMU Application				
b. Dependent Variable: Community Participation				

The model explains a substantial portion (84.6%) of the variance in Community Participation, as indicated by the R Square value. The high R value (0.920) suggests a strong relationship between the predictors (Knowledge Gain, SMU Principle Training, SMU Application) and the dependent variable (Community Participation). The model appears to fit the data well, with a reasonably low standard error of the estimate.

R (Correlation Coefficient): R = 0.920: This is the multiple correlation coefficient between the observed values and the predicted values of the dependent variable. A value close to 1 indicates a strong positive relationship between the predictors and the dependent variable.

R Square = 0.846: This represents the proportion of the variance in the dependent variable (Community Participation) that is predictable from the independent variables (Knowledge Gain, SMU Principle Training, and SMU Application).Adjusted R Square = 0.843: This is a modified version of R Square that adjusts for the number of predictors in the model. It's generally considered more accurate when comparing models with different numbers of predictors.

The model explains a substantial portion (84.6%) of the variance in Community Participation, as indicated by the R Square value. The high R value (0.920) suggests a strong relationship between the predictors (Knowledge Gain, SMU Principle Training, SMU Application) and the dependent variable (Community Participation). It means that the more principle of SaemaulUndong approach would be trained, the more community participation increases.

Table 6 (Residuals Statistics) shows residual statistics from a regression analysis, with Community Participation as the dependent variable:

- Predicted Value: These are the expected values of community participation predicted by regression model based on the independent variables with thevalues range from -0.9427 to 5.3056. The mean predicted value is 3.8012, showing the average predicted level of community participation.
- Residual: The difference between the actual value and the predicted value (Actual - Predicted) with thevalues range from -1.43915 to 1.94266, meaning some predictions were off by almost ±2 units. The mean is zero, which is expected in a well-fitted regression model.
- Standardized Predicted Value: These predicted values are converted into z-scores (standardized values), helping compare values on a standard scale (mean = 0, SD = 1).
- Standardized Residual: Residuals (errors) are also converted to z-scores. Values beyond ±2 or ±3 suggest outliers or unusual data points. In this case, standardized residuals range from -3.173 to 4.283, indicating the presence of a few outliers in the model.and N = 161: The number of cases (observations) used in the analysis.

Therefore, the model predicts community

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participation values fairly well, with average residuals close to zero.Standardized residuals show a few potential outliers (values > ±3).The standard deviation of the residuals is 0.44934, indicating how much the actual values deviate from the predicted ones on average.Overall, this table helps assess the accuracy and consistency of the regression model(See Table 6).

Table6: Residuals Statistics

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Predicted Value	-.9427	5.3056	3.8012	1.05278	161
Residual	-1.43915	1.94266	.00000	.44934	161
Std. Predicted Value	-4.506	1.429	.000	1.000	161
Std. Residual	-3.173	4.283	.000	.991	161
a. Dependent Variable: Community Participation					

The research also found that the trainees from SMU center (CKRDC) continue to practice the skills they have learned to change their mindset and take the knowledge they gained to reach out to the other villagers in the community. SMU center (CKRDC) is a big part of increasing people's income in the project by utilizing any knowledge that trainees have learned. The trainees as the leaders of the village are able to lead the community well. People in the community of the target province pay attentions on their community development with confidence, transparency, and love. During the implementing, SMU projects by MRD have supported the development of community as part of building the social infrastructure in the communities. The target provinces with SMU principle were established by performing specific roles and activities associated with legitimacy of decentralization in Cambodia. The overall increase in awareness of development effectiveness of community residents indicates that the effect for community driven sustainable community development has improved. The acceptance of SaemaulUndong Development Model can be applied.

Table 8 presents the results of a Pearson correlation analysis between two variables: Decentralization System and SMU (SaemaulUndong) Application. The correlation coefficient between Decentralization System and SMU Application is 0.878. This value is very high and positive, indicating a strong positive correlation. A value close to 1.0 means that as one variable increases, the other also increases consistently. The result of Significance (Sig. 2-tailed), the p-value is 0.000, which is less than 0.01, is statistically significant at the 0.01 level, meaning there's strong evidence that the correlation is not due to chance.

Therefore, there is a strong and statistically significant positive relationship between the implementation of a decentralization system and the application of the SMU model. In practical terms, this suggests that as decentralization increases, the effectiveness or frequency of SMU application also increases. This finding supports the idea that local governance structures (decentralization) may facilitate or enhance the implementation of community development models like SMU (See Table 7).

Table7: Correlations (Decentralization System and SMU Application)

		Decentralization	SMU Application
Decentralization System	Pearson Correlation	1	.878**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	161	161
SMU Application	Pearson Correlation	.878**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	161	161

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**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The indicators of measurement of leader's efficacy and people's participation, which are the dependent variables in this study, compared to independent variable, are positively defined in the operational definitions. A set of recommendations to the SaemaulUndong principle by training and performance in the project of Self-Supporting Rural Development with Saemaul Undong's Approach by MRD, which was known as the independent variable in this research, was positively recorded with highest improvement of real awareness on development effectiveness.

Therefore, the project "Self-supporting Rural Development Project with SaemaulUndong (SMU)'s Participation Approach in Cambodia" has contributed to community leadership and rural development model.SeamaulUndong rural development model can be applied in general not only in the villagers of the target provinces, but also across the country.

5. Discussion

This research evaluates the application of the SaemaulUndong (SMU) model in rural Cambodia, focusing on leadership development, community participation, and sustainable rural transformation. Drawing from a case study of 12 villages and one center across three provinces, the study emphasizes the critical role of community leadership in successful rural development.

- **Leadership and Governance Impact**: The SMU model enhances leadership efficacy at the community level, helping planners, policymakers, and rural development practitioners design better interventions. It supports defining roles and responsibilities within Village Development Committees (VDCs) and contributes to the legitimacy of decentralized governance.
- **Capacity Building and Training**: CKRDC played a pivotal role in training over 30 villages, equipping farmers with modern agricultural techniques, and improving knowledge and community participation.
- **Community Development Outcomes**: Improved sanitation, skills, and self-reliance through self-help groups.Increased income generation and productivity.Stronger community organizations, with financial contributions from both project funds and villagers.
- **Women's Participation**: Women actively engaged in leadership roles and were supported by their communities, contributing significantly to the SMU initiatives.
- **Comparative Insights and Scalability**: While SMU originates from Korea's post-war recovery, its principles—diligence, self-help, and cooperation—are applicable to Cambodia. Despite cultural and contextual differences, SMU is adaptable with sufficient government support.
- **Government Engagement and Institutionalization**: The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) now oversees SMU training programs and should continue promoting community pride and leadership recognition through initiatives such as the SMU Leaders' Convention and awards.

The study's limited sample size (12 villages) out of 14,545 nationwide reduces generalizability.Leaders' understanding of SMU was constrained by short-term training. The research only focuses on SMU project villages, excluding other high-performing non-SMU communities.

The SMU model has shown promise in strengthening community leadership and rural development in Cambodia. Despite limitations, the project succeeded in raising awareness, building capacity, and mobilizing local participation. For broader national application, continued support, comprehensive training, and systematic evaluation are required to align SMU leadership with Cambodia's decentralization goals.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1Conclusion

In conclusion, in order to foster a society that prioritizes healthy and sustainable village

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development we need to identify and develop excellent leaders by using SMU approach because of the Spirit of diligence, Self-help, and Cooperation through training is the way to make people more participate in community activities. A good leader understands that his/her own transformation and society transformation are both required; know how to build consensus and cooperation with the public. Village leaders need establish a clear goal embraced by all members of the community first and second the action plan should ensure both profit and a sense of achievement for all.

Therefore, the most urgently required tasks were how to build up new social capitals that were lacking in those days. Actually, the needed resources were provided jointly by the government and rural residents. It meant that the change in people's attitudes and mindsets was essential to prompt the implementation of SMU project. The research study argues that the spirit of SMU was a kind of social capital required for solving the problems and forming the basis of rural development, and that SMU model is a social innovation in a sense that it could eradicate the poverty.

6.2 Recommendations

To successfully launch rural development innovations in poor communities, strong government involvement is essential. The government must provide initial support through political will, leadership, and clear administration. It should also encourage active community participation by revitalizing or replacing inactive Village Development Committee (VDC) members and ensuring each member has defined roles aligned with community needs.A key barrier to rural progress is villagers' pessimism about their potential. To overcome this, projects should focus on delivering public goods that benefit all and promote community-driven models like the SaemaulUndong (SMU), expanding their application beyond rural development.

The Ministry of Rural Development (MRD) should build the capacity of VDCs by training members in data usage for village planning. CKRDC should carefully select trainees based on assessments and compare results with non-trainees to measure impact.Poor rural households struggle to access markets and compete in modern value chains. Thus, income-generation projects should target areas with broad benefits and focus on collective value-chain participation to enhance bargaining power. Capacity development should strengthen institutional arrangements, leadership, knowledge, and accountability.Project management is hindered by a lack of categorization, making it hard to measure outcomes. Lessons from Korea's SMU project reveal the limitations of purely community-led approaches. In Cambodia, SMU implementation must integrate market-driven elements to ensure sustainability and address local weaknesses effectively.

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