

World Water Forum 7

Session 1.2.1: Reaching Universal Access to Sanitation

Keynote Address

Case-study of Korea's achievement of universal access to sanitation

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Korea Rural Community Corporation

[Opening Statement]

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen.

Thank you, Honorable Chair Catarina de Albuquerque.

It is timely and just that the immense outstanding challenges of the global community be brought forward and emphasized.

The magnitude of the outstanding sanitation challenges facing the world today is nothing that should be taken lightly or with patience.

Especially since 2.5 billion people still lack access to improved sanitation facilities.

Immediate and long-term health consequences of poor sanitation has been scientifically proven and not acting upon it will fetter those affected from benefitting, engaging, and contributing to an ever more dynamic global society .

As a member of the international community, I wish to share some of Korea's experience on how we, as a nation, improved environmental sanitation of the rural communities under a broader national program of rural revitalization and beautification.

[The Korean Experience]

If you look around Korea today, it may seem that we have little to speak on the subject of sanitation since the improvements are already ubiquitous.

However, I would like to point out that this was not always the case.

The multifaceted transformation of Korea from the rags of war to where it stands today occurred in a single generation and today I wish to share how in that process we had addressed the sanitation problems in the process.

Due to the limitation of time, my focus will be on how we improved rural environmental sanitation, which the Korea Rural Community Corporation is still actively engaged in.

[Three key messages]

Today, I will focus on three key messages for sanitation improvements. One, Central and Local Governments' planned collaboration and community participation; two, technical assistance; and three, leadership education.

Please allow me to elaborate each one in sequence.

First, sanitation improvements were not the by-products of economic prosperity but rather the product of central and local governments' planned collaboration fueled by community's collective desire for improvement.

What does this mean?

Korea's efforts to systematically improve environmental sanitation in the rural areas occurred in the late 1960s, as rural development became the focus of the 3rd 5-Year Economic Development Plan.

Korea's GDP-per-capita was less than \$200 US dollars in 1968 when the plans had been drafted.

Recognizing the fact that Korea lacks natural resources and economic growth in the 1960s was spurred by export oriented industrialization, the question then becomes why the government shifted gears and invested in rural communities at such a critical time in Korea's economic growth.

Emphasis on rural development in the 1970s arose as income disparity between the industrialized urban centers and the rural farming communities resulted in large rural to urban migration

The mass exodus of rural population searching for jobs in the urban areas exacerbated the living condition of the urban areas which led to larger urban slums and in turn deteriorated the urban sanitation.

Central and local governments sought ways to shield themselves from the negative consequences of urbanization, and rural development was proposed as one of its solutions.

Rural development was focused not only on increasing productivity but encompassed a broader agenda of improving the living conditions of the rural areas by investing in basic rural infrastructure to make it a desirable place to live in. In other words,

the aim was to improve the wellbeing of not just the urban population but every citizen. In this context, the sanitation and hygiene conditions in the rural areas gradually improved.

The various components of these efforts were enveloped within the Saemaul Undong or literally in English, the New Community Movement.

At first, the Government established departments responsible for implementing the Saemaul Undong. Detailed plans clarified responsibilities between the central and local governments covering all provinces, cities, districts, and sub-districts. One public officer was assigned to each village, each of whom played a pivotal role as a mediator and coordinator through shared guidelines and plans. More importantly, the officers carefully and accurately diagnosed the local development status and continued to facilitate the progress.

In addition the government appointed a Saemaul village leader in each village. These leaders were provided with incentives such as leader certificates, farm loans, public transportation subsidies, medical benefits, and special tax exemptions, which in total enabled the Saemaul village leaders to play a key role in realizing rural changes in 1970's.

[Upload the pictures]

As you see in the slides, rural environmental sanitation had been significantly improved during this period.

It is important to note that the villagers were not left on their own to improve their wellbeing. Rather, the villages relied on the peoples' participation in the form of collective voluntary labor.

The government, on the other hand, assisted the villages with bags of cement and steel wires.

These resources were versatile, and enabled the community to discuss and prioritize their village improvement projects in order to utilize the scarce resources in the most efficient and effective manner.

[Upload picture of village improvement plans]

As can be seen, the resources were used in a series of village improvement projects including sanitation and hygiene improvements.

In other words, the government resources were provided to address not just individual sanitation, but the broader ecology of the community.

Another form of support came from the late President Park Jung Hee.

Late President Park would invite individual farmers participating in the Saemaul Undong to report directly to himself and share their success stories in front of all cabinet members. This had a very functional aspect whereby he would ask his cabinet members to take measures to help the farmers further improve their wellbeing.

In addition, these success stories of Saemaul Undong would be broadcasted on public television which would help maintain national enthusiasm on the movement.

My second key message is on the necessity of technical assistance in improving rural environmental sanitation.

It is important to note that the success of Saemaul Undong including improving rural environmental sanitation came from the contribution of technical support. A series of Saemaul Undong projects faced two challenges, livelihood enhancement and income improvement. These challenges could not be overcome only with one's will and resources, it required technical assistance.

Technical assistance came through voluntary assistance from professors and experts from various fields along with the officials from the government.

Saemaul Volunteer Teams, composed of professors and experts, provided essential expert skills on a wide range of fields including agriculture, fisheries, forestry, environment, public health and sanitation through extension services and technical assistance.

On the other hand, the government organized a technical support team to actively assist throughout the entire process of project implementation that required professional assistance such as housing construction.

Throughout the implementation process, the Korean government considered sanitation improvement as cleanliness of the living

environment, therefore focused on developing sewerage system along with drinking water unlike other developing countries.

Cleanliness was promoted for its long-term public health benefits and organization for efficiency and economy, both benefitting from expert advice which was actively disseminated by both the people as well as the government.

My last message that I wish the audience to take away today is that leadership education was crucial to promoting public awareness.

Community level efforts to continuously improve environmental sanitation will only continue when the benefits are experienced by the individuals and appreciated over the long-term with increased awareness of its long-term benefits through education.

The merit of nesting sanitation improvements within the broader rural vitalization program was that the ever-evolving village landscape reinforced a sense of change, a change for the better.

This interactive and interpretational aspect was crucial to build community ownership and solidarity for the project as it required peoples' participation for multiple years.

As projects became more sophisticated, training programs for the Saemaul village leaders became ever more essential for the projects to be properly designed and successfully implemented to deliver the expected long-term benefits.

Village leaders participated in programs that inspired the will to improve their community. Especially intensive information and technology education provided by Saemaul Training Center contributed to enhanced will and sense of duty. Consequently, the leaders became the advocates and educators in promoting the long-term benefits and faithfully took on the responsibility as an educator of a village.

[Concluding Remarks]

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the three main success factors behind Korea's remarkable enhancement of rural environmental sanitation. First, planned collaboration and community participation; second, village level technical assistance; and third, village leadership education. Korea's experience has shown that these three aspects are crucial components when addressing the rural environmental sanitation challenges. The Korean Government and Korea Rural Community Corporation look forward to assisting the international community on any of these aspects.

I'd like to conclude by thanking our organizers Sanitation and Water for All, World Bank, and the United Nations today for allowing me to share Korea's experience.