



UNIVERSITY OF HOHENHEIM

Master's Thesis

Exploring Korea's unique development aid model via the "can-do" spirit: the case of pilot villages in northern Ethiopia

Name: Ivan Minsung Lee (M.Sc. Agricultural Economics)

First supervisor: Prof. Dr. Regina Birner (Chair of Social and Institutional Change in
Agricultural Development)

Second supervisor: Prof. Dr. Manfred Zeller (Chair of Rural Development Theory and Policy)

University of Hohenheim (August 2019)

*This work was financially supported by the
Foundation fiat panis*

Abstract

In the current landscape of international development aid, emerging Southern donors are revising the traditional structure of North-South development aid (SSC). A member of the North economically, but also of the South historically, South Korea has engaged in SSC by promoting a rural development program that was successful in the 1970s called Saemaul Undong (SMU, “New Village Movement”). SMU has been highlighted by its “can-do” spirit, empowering rural villages to participate in agricultural rural development projects. In partnership with the United Nations Development Programme and Millennium Villages Project, Korea has shared its know-how by setting up SMU pilot villages.

Against this background, this study explored the accounts and impacts of the “can-do” spirit in SMU villages in northern Ethiopia. Focusing on in-depth details on the experiences shared from the village’s perspective as well as the local stakeholders’, we visited five villages (three SMU, two non-SMU) conducting interviews and focus group discussions. This study found that SMU pilot villages were focused on three areas: infrastructure building, income generation, and “can-do” spirit training. In general, the pilot villages had mixed results. First, infrastructure projects had some success (roads, toilets, village halls, etc.); however, water-related infrastructure was ineffective or quickly became unusable due to faulty designs and lack of maintenance. Second, non-farm income sources such as brickmaking and sewing were introduced, but trainings were limited to a few participants and the lack of expertise in poultry farming led to unsuccessful outcomes. Interestingly, the “can-do” spirit was not an area of focus. Trainings focusing on aspiration and empowerment were limited and only implemented during the last year (5th year) of the project period.

In addition, Korean volunteers may have unintendedly replaced the position of a “Saemaul Leader,” an important actor who bridged the voices between local villagers and government officials. Once the Korean volunteers left, there was a lack of communication between the government and the villagers; as a result, sustainability and scalability of the pilot villages remained questionable. On the other hand, Saemaul Academy engaged the youth and fostered youth empowerment and aspirations; it showed the potential to contribute to rural development. Up to this point, it was unclear whether Korea’s approach to development aid was any different from the traditional infrastructure-focused development aid approach. As a novel extension of SSC, in which a Northern country exchanges knowledge from its Southern past, SMU could focus on strengthening local governance and empowering the youth to raise future leaders.