Policy integration or Policy enforcement? A case study from South Korea’s experiences of the New Community Movement

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Korean economic and political development dramatically changed in the early twentieth century through fluctuations such as invasion by Japan from 1919 to 1945 and the Korean War 1950-1953. Since President Park suggested Saemaul Undong (the New Community or Village Movement or NCM) in 1971 as a new political structure for improving the livelihood in rural areas, it has been seen as playing a major role to alleviate fundamental poverty in Korea (Kwon, 1997). Although NCM is characterized as a typical Asian government-led development project for its nation-wide economic development, its practices and procedures at the village level revealed its community-based participatory approaches and democratic decision-making processes. While the NCM kept emphasizing the role of community and participation, it also played its characteristic role to bridge rural areas and the central government in 1970’s South Korea. The NCM as an institutional form or program was in between the very local and the national level, and so it could be called an integrated political system. This study will focus on this relation between the local community and the government under the NCM; particularly it will analyze the NCM as an institution which leads the local people to participate in NCM projects along with building people’s social capital. Using qualitative methods mainly, the actual practices in the village level in terms of institutional approaches can be assessed. Also, through analysis of the case of NCM in Korea in terms of policy integration, the potential benefits and complications of policy integration may arise. From this vantage point, the transferability of NCM for rural development plans in other developing countries might be evaluated.