

# Conditions for Promoting Participatory Rural Development in Korea

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## ABSTRACT

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This article aims to draw up suggestions on conditions for participatory rural development in Korea. Rural development policies since 2000 have emphasized local community participation. However obstacles are identified such as the troubled circumstances in which local communities face and the lack of governments' understanding over locality in implementing participatory rural development. Endogenous self-organizations, local participation, capacitation and empowerment, local governance through partnership are important conditions to be met during the participatory development projects. These are realized not just by the aggregation of separate individuals but by linking them together and interdependent.

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**Keywords:** rural community, endogenous self-organization, local participation, capacitation, local governance, partnership, participatory rural development

## Introduction Why participatory development in rural Korea?

Despite continuous efforts both by the central and local governments, rural communities in Korea have faced with various agricultural, social, and demographic problems. Since the year 2000, a number of policies have been

<sup>1</sup>)It links with rural livelihoods in a wide range of ecological and economic settings. Food production, flood control and water resource conservation are the main functions of agricultural lands. In addition, place for leisure and recreation and environment education are also provided (Soda et al., 2006).

introduced emphasizing the multiple functions of agricultural biodiversity<sup>1</sup> such as green tourism that utilizes local resources, urban-rural exchange, and the production and sale of processed agricultural products. In the rural development process, the feasibility of bottom-up development has been demonstrated by local people and rural communities taking the initiative and creating partnerships with both the central and regional governments (Bu and Kim, 2010; Bu, 2010). Such recent rural developments based on local participant lead to the utilization of local knowledge, local resources and making regulations for proper

resource management. Recent trends of the rural developments emphasize that promoting local economy can be achievable with preserving multiple functions of agricultural land and biodiversity, which then could be a way of pursuing sustainable rural development as well. Present participation-based approach so called 'bottom-up' or 'community initiatives' for rural development was born by the negative effects from previous central government initiated rural development for decades in Korea. Hence, contemporary rural development needs to be understood in the context of previous regional development and resulting changes in local societies. Severe regional disparities between urban and rural areas, rapid depopulation and increase of aging population, shortage of farm successors in rural areas in particular are the realistic indicators what the rural Korea has to face with (Bu, 2010). These are the conditions to be dealt with development projects, but they seem to work as obstacles to the implementation of participatory development for rural communities due to the shortage of capital and human resources.

How rural communities can pursue participatory development if such depressing circumstances of rural communities are inevitable and continuous? This article aims to draw up some suggestions for participatory rural development under such situations in Korea.

### **Conditions for participatory developments in rural Korea**

#### *Self-organization as a rural community*

Communities in researches on participatory development domain and governance of common pool resource have been defined as those having 'small spatial unit' and 'homogeneous social structure' as well as

'shared norms' (Agrawal and Gibson, 1999). They are also described as a community organization which use and manage only local resources. This article considers communities as community organizations which are made by local residents within a village community. They are not only the organization which uses and manages local resources but also representative organizations of all members, that is, whole village communities and organizations initiating development projects. Community organizations are various and have their own functions and structures (Bu, 2010, 2011). They are categorized in certain number of types based on major characteristics in which the community organizations in rural areas of both Japan and Korea are to be classified into 'endogenous organizations' and 'exogenous organizations' by their formative principle and foundation (Kim, 2003; Shigetomi, 2006)<sup>2</sup>. Endogenous organizations are based on face-to-face relationship among members and established by them spontaneously. Consequently, endogenous organizations are the one which have authority coming from local communities. In so doing, they can have compelling power that lets members accept organizational norms. Moreover, endogenous organizations are able to be divided into 'endogenous self-organizations' and 'endogenous coordinating organizations' by the aims of organizations. Endogenous self-organizations, in particular, are the one that adjusts social relations responding to needs in order to sustain the lives of members<sup>3</sup> as well as incubate endogenous coordinating organizations. The character of endogenous

<sup>2</sup>Kim examined rural areas of northeastern Asian countries.

Japan and Korea, while Shigetomi treated rural areas of southeastern Asian countries-Thailand and Philippine.

<sup>3</sup>On the other hand, endogenous coordinating organizations are the one that have specialized function to expand individual benefits.

self-organizations can be described as below.

“ ... villagers have more nuanced knowledge of their needs and concerns, of the environment in which they operate, and of the local conditions that would need to be taken into account in any effort to foster improvements in their quality of life” (Bebbington et al., 2006: 1958).

In addition, endogenous self-organizations make decisions regulating opinions and the interests of members, mobilizing necessary local resources when instigating development projects or community activities. They negotiate with local governments and/or developers to include their opinions into development policies representing all individuals of the community. In these regards, they are identified as a negotiator and a representative of the community (Bu and Kim, 2010; Bu, 2010). In other words, due to the fact that endogenous self-organizations have authority accrued from the bottoms of community, they are an organizational representative functioning to govern by themselves and incubate sub-organizations. Endogenous self-organizations are thus a self-governing organization. All organizational systems of endogenous self-organizations are complete within the village community where they belong. It links to enhancing their capacitation.<sup>4</sup>

### **Local participation as the subject of development projects**

Local participation (or local involvement) is one of the most important factors in sustainable rural development. According to Storey (1999), notions of integrated development involving local people were popular in the third world

<sup>4</sup>)According to Nagamine (1985), capacitation means the ability to address or solve social –local problems and it includes enhancing the ability as well.

and the general aims were the improvement of living conditions. Nonetheless, bottom-up approach emphasizing the importance of local participation to rural development is currently considered as a more appropriated strategy. It is because local communities are the one who knows well what they need and adjust individuals’ opinion, and moreover can mobilize appropriate local resources during development projects. Accordingly, the role of local communities in development projects is important. That is, local participation is different from simply attending as a spectator. It means that local communities become the subject of development projects: participating in all phases: planning, implementing and evaluating, managing projects and activities, mediating and reflecting opinions and ideas (De Beer and Swanepoel, 1998). It means for local communities to take initiatives in development projects.

In order to participate and exercise communities’ influence in all the phases of development projects, organization formed by local people themselves<sup>5</sup> (Shigetomi, 1996) and decentralization (Nishikawa, 1996) are essential. It is for the reason that local people who are expected to participate in are in weak position politically and economically. Hence, they can hardly get power to influence decision making. In addition, authority should be transferred from higher authorities to community organizations.

### **Capacitation of rural communities and**

<sup>5</sup>)Forming community organizations must take place spontaneously. Otherwise, inevitable would be the dual structure: community organizations and higher authorities of outsider who take initiatives in organizing. The very typical instances are found in Japan where local people tend to establish organizations for development projects or self-governance under the guidance of administration. As a result, community organizations turned out as the terminal administration unit and performed only duties and orders imposed by higher administrative authority.

## **Empowerment**

Same development projects often bring different outcomes. The degree of capacitation varies across rural communities due to differences in social and economic circumstances, varieties of the needs and local problems each community has. These influence the degree of community response and capacitation, and moreover determine the size and management style of capacitation and the roles of communities. Whether regional developments can contribute to rural communities depends on the capacitation of communities since it controls relevant activities and responds to resulting changes spontaneously. That is, capacitation is the power to do something, and at the same time an available resource because communities involved address tasks, projects and local problems, directly (Bebbington et al., 2006).

Improving capacitation of communities links to community empowerment. Empowerment is a process or an outcome to authorize groups or individuals to take parts in decision making. And the process implies resulting changes in consciousness and abilities of people. However empowerment will take place when accompanying shift occurs in the power balance between “center” and “periphery” and/or between “professionals” and “amateurs” (Storey, 1999). In other words, empowerment can be realized through active participation of local communities and transfer of authority among actors.

## **Local governance through partnership**

Recent trends in rural development imply the integration and involvement of various actors. And this leads to the emphasis on partnership (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000; Storey,

1999). Partnership is a key of cooperating society in which actors such as municipalities, citizens and experts collaborate through networks and partnership to reach common aims. And this leads to interdependence between organizations, and cooperation between governmental organizations and non-governmental organizations. Governance implies all these system as the core. According to Rhodes (1997), governance is self-organizing, inter-organizational networks, and equal, cooperating system among actors. Hence governance is necessary in order to perform participatory rural development at local level.

On the other hand, governance causes improvement in management or increase governing skill through its interference at times (Goodwin, 1998). Common aims are able to be achieved through cooperation between government and non-government organizations, citizens under the governance system. Unless there is shift in power, governance will not take place, but the means of government will only be altered (Herbert-Cheshire, 2000). Therefore, in the process of decision making by various actors, government interference must be minimized and not only institutional devices but also decentralization (or shift in the power) are expected to be involved. Balance in power requires not only the institutional strategies but also actors' change of consciousness, and the changes in their relations.

## **Conclusion: promoting participatory rural development**

Participatory rural development arose after the catastrophic results of government initiated development as an alternative strategy toward a sustainable development of rural areas. In order to promote participatory rural

development, locals involvement should be more than just participation of people, It should includes the formation of endogenous self-organizations, capacitation and empowerment of the organizations, and furthermore the local governance that guarantees partnership among actors. Especially endogenous self-organizations are fundamental element because they are the only one who fully understands locality, able to mobilize local resources and meditate not only the members' opinions but also their interests. They can also make networks with outsiders. Community capacitation itself should come from inside not outside.

In order to meet these conditions, power transfer from the center to the periphery, from administration to local communities must be carried out. This allows community participation in decision making process and improvement of local capacitation. Rural community empowerment would follow as a consequence. Governance through partnerships among actors also enhances spontaneous participation of rural communities. All the conditions are not separate but interdependent, linked each other. Even if certain priorities might be set among them, it is necessary to meet the conditions all together during the process of participatory development projects.

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