

「This article is a translation of a newspaper column written by Global Saemaul Undong Forum President CHOI Oe-chool to commemorate the 46th annual Saemaul Day」

## Why Global Saemaul Development?



**Dr. CHOI Oe-chool**

President, Global Saemaul Undong Forum

Vice-president and Professor,

Department of Saemaul Studies and International  
Development, Yeungnam University

April 22nd is Saemaul Day. In 1970, then Korean President Park Chung-hee advocated the Saemaul Undong as the best policy for eradicating poverty across the nation. What began 46 years ago in Korea has now spread beyond its borders in the fight against global poverty.

Korea's Saemaul Undong was no mere "movement". It was Saemaul Development, a comprehensive policy framework for regional development. Today Saemaul is alive and well, regarded as a beacon shining on the path out of poverty for developing nations. In 2013 when Saemaul was entered into UNESCO's Memory of the World Register it was regarded as, "A miracle realized through the trust of leaders and the public." Reviewers emphasized the brilliance of its achievements and driving mechanisms.

Our world today sees more than a billion people living on less than \$1.25 a day in absolute poverty and another billion without basic sanitation in their homes. These people are never free from their struggles with food, water, medical care, or shelter. Absolute poverty is the most extensive and serious threat to the continued existence of humanity and must be overcome in order to realize safe and happy lives for all of humanity. But when seen from the perspective of human experience, reducing poverty has never been easy. We must have reasonable and practical efforts to unite humanity in pursuit of overcoming this scourge.

Last year the world adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the 2016 to 2030 development agenda. Korea's development experience can have a significant impact on the 17 categories in the agenda set such as ending poverty, health and welfare, and gender equality. The majority of the SDGs are

within the scope of Saemaul Development. This is especially true for Saemaul's experience as an actual escape from poverty, itself having been declared a useful educational model for developing nations.

Requests from the international community for sharing Saemaul Development have been growing, so in order to fulfill its role as a model for sustainable development in the future it is critical to systematize its theoretical and academic development. After the need for forming Saemaul into an academic discipline was first raised in 2007, efforts in this direction bore fruit in 2013 when the first class of masters-degree students was sent forth and Saemaul Studies was able to take its rightful place in academia. At present around 220 international students from 47 nations are studying Saemaul and Korea's development experience at Yeungnam University's Park Chung-hee School of Policy and Saemaul. Among the current students are senior civil servants, college deans, lawyers, doctorates, professionals, and other elite talent.

Saemaul Studies is already becoming Korea's number one academic export. From the 3rd to the 11th of this month, students from the first overseas Department of Saemaul Studies (Saemaul Economics) at Enderun College in the Philippines came to experience Saemaul education and Korea's development background. Furthermore, there have been transfer requests to Korea from 55 nations in addition to the approximately 140 countries that have received Saemaul training and the 120 that have completed training camps.

These days in Korea the retirement of the generation of baby boomers and those that experienced development is in full swing. This generation experienced a childhood of both poverty and aid from the international community, and are the ones that actually lived the Saemaul Undong. If you look at the developing nations that want to learn from Korea's experience, there are not many destinations which can offer such a valuable generation of mentors. Korea is the only nation with a generation that has such an experience. We have an obligation to contribute to the fight against global poverty, and so we must actively strive for the development of impoverished nations around the world.

Global Saemaul Development is the way to achieve a safer and happier world. It is the way to realize the dream of worldwide mutual co-prosperity. It is a new paradigm for Korean official development assistance (ODA). For the joint development between Korea and developing nations, actively using Saemaul can be thought of as a shortcut for improving the quality of life for people all around the world. This is the reason that the world focuses on Global Saemaul Development on this day.