

Workshop n° 19/39 - Social Inclusion

**THE MEANING, VISION AND STRATEGIES OF 'RAINBOW PROJECT'
FOR OVERCOMING SOCIAL EXCLUSION
IN DAEJEON METROPOLITAN CITY, REPUBLIC OF KOREA**

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At the age of polarization as well as globalization, the notion of social exclusion has attained some prominence in the field of social science. As the process that an individual or a group is being excluded partially or totally from his or her society, it is considered a concept meaning the opposite of social integration. As complex phenomena in this regard concentrate geographically in a certain area, 'neighborhood' is becoming an important focal point to overcome it. In the case of Republic of Korea (ROK) in which race and ethnicity are identical, the residential segregation based on neighborhood socioeconomic status is distinctive.

Especially the permanent public rental housing, introduced more than 10 years ago to improve housing security for less-privileged people, has naturally led the needy to concentrate in a certain local area, causing physical and social disorder or anti-social behavior. Externally they have been marginalized and experiencing prejudice and discrimination from their neighbor communities.

Responding to deep concerns raised by local media as well as researchers with the social disintegration in Daejeon Metropolitan City, the fifth largest city in ROK, 'Rainbow Project' was introduced by the city government in 2006 to tackle complex problems in poor neighborhoods. Initially targeting on the three most disadvantaged permanent rental apartment areas, the project has invested about \$23.6 million for 85 programs, 28 out them completed, as of December, 2007. The programs cover diverse policy areas such as housing, education, health, employment, and physical environment, and target on different group of people including children, youth, elderly or disabled people, single parent family, alcoholics, and North Korean defectors. The city has identified some positive results and is now planning to expand to other disadvantaged neighbourhoods including non-public housing area. This study is to explore the meaning of the project in the context of the Korean social welfare administration, examine its short-term results as well as its vision and strategies, and provide some suggestions to improve it.

The project is an important pilot experiment to deal with complex and 'wicked' problems in disadvantaged neighbourhood. It is quite distinguished from the previous urban redevelopment programs in ROK, mostly having focused on physical environmental improvement in poor areas. Rather it takes a more comprehensive approach from physical, social and economic perspectives to residents' needs in poor neighbourhoods. That is, the project takes 'joined-up approach' to tackle 'joined up problems' in poor areas, similar to Neighbourhood Renewal in the United Kingdom.

In addition, the project is a fresh effort to be interpreted and bear the direction from neighbourhood governance point of view in ROK. Unlike most decentralized advanced countries, ROK, in spite of having officially taken a local autonomy system, is still very behind in devolving much political, administrative, and financial power from central government to local governments. Under such political and administrative culture, most people have been concerned not so much with small local community issues as national or regional ones. Particularly welfare policies tend to be homogenized nationally or regionally and made with little consideration of spatial dimension such as residential segregation based on neighbourhood. Rarely do programs and institutions exist to deal with neighbourhood as the unit of welfare policy target. The Rainbow Project is officially focusing on

neighbourhood as the policy target, and tries to streamline existing welfare service delivery system, restore community value in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and reintegrate them with other parts of the city. Referring to the types of neighbourhood governance suggested by Lowndes & Sullivan(2006), the project is now in the emerging stage of 'neighbourhood management' and will go on to 'neighbourhood empowerment' and/or 'neighbourhood partnership' in the middle or long run.

The project, along with the emphasis on neighbourhood governance, recognizes the importance of 'social capital' in poor communities. The concept highlights important resources that may have been overlooked in earlier welfare analyses and practices in ROK that emphasize essentially individual resources such as education and employment. Interpreted as networks, trust and reciprocity, social capital has been not only valued as public goods in their own right, but also instrumental in the sense of mobilizing relational resources to meet policy ends. From a social capital perspective, a much more indirect governmental role is recommended to increase the capacity of communities to help themselves. At the local level, mutual aid and self-help, facilitated by a diversity of loose ties and mediating organizations, are considered to provide solutions and alternatives. Recognizing the primary importance of the capacity of civil society itself to tackle social problems, the Rainbow Project is now seeing neighbourhood as the most potential receptacle for social capital, and takes several programmatic steps to recreate social ties and associated cultural traits among poor residents in distressed areas.

The vision of the Rainbow Project may be described as leading the disadvantaged neighbourhood to the status of "Empowered Open Community as a New Partner for City Prosperity." Open community means the poor neighborhoods will not be marginalized, segregated or disadvantaged from the rest of the society any more. Furthermore, the project visualizes the future of residents in distressed areas as acquiring and exercising individual or collective capacity, and making an important contribution to the city prosperity same as other citizens, as well as standing on their own feet.

The project sets two strategic goals to lead such a vision. The first goal focuses on improving the quality of life in poor neighbourhoods and reducing the socioeconomic disparity between them and other neighbourhoods. The second one is to strengthen social ties and collective capacity among residents in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Each strategic goal has its own strategies. For example, the first goal is to be achieved by joined-up and mainstreaming strategies. The former means a whole-of-government initiative in city level and a coordination effort between city, district, and local communities. Mainstreaming, originally used in the Neighbourhood Renewal in the UK, is to direct main programs of public services including education, health, social housing, to meet the needs of people living in failing neighbourhoods, by means of retargeting the available resources, reshaping the local services, and/or experimentation of and learning from new programs. The second strategic goal is to be achieved by establishing diverse programs guided by three concepts of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking one. Bonding social capital puts emphasis on social ties and norms inside poor community, while bridging one is more concerned with the horizontal relationship across the heterogeneous communities. Linking social capital leads us to focus more on the hierarchical or vertical relationship between poor communities and government which has the official power and resources. Bonding social capital may help a poor community to be 'getting on', but not enough for 'getting ahead'. The latter requires bridging and linking social capital.

A qualitative analysis was carried out on the early result of the project in January, 2008. A focus group interview with 20 permanent rental housing residents in Panam-Dong, the first target area, identifies some early positive aspects of the project, such as improvement in residential physical environment, increase of residents' interest in community affairs, positive influence on children and youth groups, etc. Even though it is too early to judge the success or failure for most programs in such a short period, a program called 'Rainbow Tutorial System' deserves a special attention. It is to build a tutorial relationship between newly employed young public servants in the city government and elementary and middle school students in disadvantaged areas. Initially 46 newcomers who passed the highly prestigious public servant exam have voluntarily taken part in the program to tutor the local students on regular basis.

The program has drawn highly positive feedback from students and their parents. It also has several academic and practical meanings. First of all, it can be considered as an attempt to alleviate negative neighbourhood effect on children's education. Residential concentration of socially disadvantaged individuals may create conditions that exacerbate educational problem in poor areas over and above individual socioeconomic characteristics. The so-called neighborhood effect posits the isolation from the poor area students from middle class and its corresponding role models and resources. The initial appraisal of the program shows it has contributed not only to improving the students' learning ability and knowledge level, but also to establishing their future role model. Secondly, the program provides an important opportunity to build linking social capital. Interview with some public servant tutors shows their deeper understanding of poor family condition and problems as a byproduct of program participation. The mutual contact and understanding between government officials and poor residents will serve as a cornerstone to empower the latter and make more relevant policies by the former.

The project has shown some limitations. Fundamentally and the most importantly it is a city level experiment, not a national one. This implies lack of sufficient financial resources, causing the city government to have no choice but to select and concentrate a small number of neighborhoods over a limited time. The financial limitation also leaves little room for the city government to maneuver or pioneer new programs. As it was rather hastily launched, in addition, there was lack of thorough analysis of residents' needs and collection of their opinion in the outset. Also mainstreaming or streamlining effort has not been substantially made as yet to direct the existing welfare programs to meet the needs of people living in poor more effectively. There has been also little effort to accommodate new institutional arrangements to support the project as shown in advanced countries' neighborhood regeneration policies.

Now in the stage of expanding to other areas, the project requires substantial exploration of the needs in newly targeted areas in advance. In addition, strategic priority setting on the programs will help to manage the problem of financial and time limit. For the project to settle down as an effective place-based welfare policy, much more solid and noticeable effort should be made with regard to mainstreaming of the existing programs, facilitation of resident participation and empowerment, and accommodation of local partnership or network arrangements. The lessons drawn from the past experience should be incorporated with more or less deductively drawn vision and strategies of the project discussed earlier. The vision, strategic goals, and strategies provide a comprehensive and systemic frame of reference, and can serve as a 'forward mapping' tool to guide the direction of the overall programs, while the lessons drawn from the completed or ongoing programs as 'backward mapping' tool to facilitate more concrete and relevant programs. We should also borrow invaluable insight from the European neighborhood regeneration cases for an effective neighborhood governance building to combat social exclusion in the Korean context.