

# POST-WAR REVITALIZATION OF UKRAINIAN AGRICULTURE: LESSONS FROM SOUTH KOREA'S RURAL DEVELOPMENT MODEL

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## Abstract

Ukraine's agricultural sector has been devastated by war, exposing systemic challenges faced by small-scale farmers, including inadequate infrastructure, limited credit access, and underdeveloped cooperatives. This study explores lessons from South Korea's post-war agricultural transformation, emphasizing sustainable governance, cooperative development, and community-driven initiatives. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combines historical analysis with expert interviews from Ukraine and South Korea to contextualize applicable strategies. South Korea's Saemaul Undong and National Agricultural Cooperative Federation provide a blueprint for fostering resilience, productivity, and inclusivity. Key recommendations include strengthening local governance through Ukraine's decentralization reforms, empowering smallholder farmers via cooperatives, and investing in infrastructure to reduce post-harvest losses. By integrating top-down policy guidance with bottom-up community engagement, Ukraine can adapt these proven strategies to its unique socio-political context, fostering sustainable recovery and resilience in its rural economy.

**Keywords:** Ukraine agriculture, post-war reconstruction, smallholder resilience, cooperative development, rural governance, community-driven recovery.

## 1. Introduction

Ukraine's agricultural sector, once a cornerstone of the nation's economy, has been significantly disrupted by the full-scale invasion of the Russian Federation. The war has caused widespread destruction of infrastructure, displacement of populations, and loss of livelihoods, with rural communities bearing the brunt of these impacts. The agricultural sector alone has sustained damages estimated at \$8.7 billion, constituting nearly a third of its total assets (World Bank, 2023). These losses have compounded existing challenges faced by small-scale farms, which contributed over 50% of agricultural output prior to the invasion (Nivievskiy, Iavorskiy and Donchenko, 2021).

Smallholder farms, cultivating an average of 2.8 hectares, have historically played a vital role in ensuring food security and rural stability. However, systemic barriers, including limited access to credit, underdeveloped infrastructure, and weak state support, have constrained their growth and resilience (Osypova and Dobrova, 2016). The war has exacerbated these issues, straining local food systems and threatening the viability of small-scale farming enterprises. Without targeted interventions, the decline of smallholder agriculture could lead to food insecurity, economic instability, and the erosion of rural livelihoods.

South Korea offers a compelling case study for overcoming similar challenges. In the aftermath of the Korean War, the country faced widespread poverty and agricultural stagnation. Yet through comprehensive reforms, including the establishment of the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF) and the Saemaul Undong movement, South Korea transformed its rural economy by leveraging a hybrid governance model that blended top-down coordination with bottom-up community engagement. This model emphasized the importance of institutional coherence, decentralized governance, and community-driven development in fostering resilience and sustainability. Korea's post-war rural development was driven by multi-stakeholder collaboration and innovative policies. These initiatives focused on empowering smallholder farmers through cooperative development, infrastructure investment, and access to credit, resulting in significant improvements in productivity and rural incomes (Hwang, 2010; Kim, 2013).

The war in Ukraine has accelerated the decentralization of governance, with local authorities increasingly tasked with managing recovery efforts. This decentralization reform, implemented between 2015 and 2020, has created opportunities for empowering local governments and communities to take a more active role in shaping their recovery trajectories. This study draws on South Korea's governance innovations and seeks to learn from South Korea's agricultural transformation to inform policy recommendations for post-war Ukraine. By examining the role of public administration systems in supporting agricultural reforms, institutional frameworks, policy measures, and community-driven programs that revitalized South Korea's agricultural sector, the research aims to propose actionable strategies for rebuilding Ukraine's rural economy. Specifically, the study focuses on adapting cooperative models, improving infrastructure, and fostering government-stakeholder collaboration to address the unique challenges facing Ukrainian small-scale farmers. Specifically, it explores how the integration of governance frameworks,

decentralization practices, and community empowerment models can create a sustainable pathway for rebuilding Ukraine's rural economy. The following research question guides this study: How can lessons from South Korea's agricultural transformation be adapted to address the systemic challenges faced by small-scale farming in post-war Ukraine to promote sustainable rural development?

## 2. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in two interrelated theoretical perspectives: sustainable well-being and decentralized governance, both of which are essential for understanding post-war agricultural recovery in Ukraine. This framework posits that sustainable well-being is achieved when economic growth aligns with social equity and environmental stewardship, fostering resilience and inclusivity in communities. Key elements include equitable resource distribution, cohesive social systems, and effective governance (Waddock, 2021). This study builds upon this concept by contextualizing its principles within the unique challenges faced by Ukraine's rural sector during post-war recovery.

Post-war recovery literature underscores the importance of multidimensional frameworks in addressing systemic inequalities and fostering long-term resilience in conflict-affected regions. Research by Barakat and Zyck (2010) highlights the critical role of governance reforms and participatory approaches in post-conflict reconstruction. Applying this lens, Ukraine's rural development necessitates not only infrastructure rebuilding but also the restoration of social trust and institutional coherence. The Sustainable Well-being framework complements this by integrating ecological sustainability with economic renewal, offering a pathway to resilient rural development.

Welfare economics, a complementary framework, examines the allocation of resources to optimize societal welfare. This perspective is particularly relevant for addressing rural inequalities exacerbated by conflict. Welfare economics highlights the importance of equitable resource distribution and efficient use of inputs to achieve societal well-being (Fleurbaey, 2018). These principles provide actionable guidelines for Ukraine's rural transformation, particularly in designing redistributive policies and cooperative structures that enhance smallholder farmers' economic viability.

Recent studies on small-scale farming and rural development further emphasize the importance of empowering local communities through inclusive governance and targeted investments. Research by Fan and Rue (2020) indicates that smallholder farming significantly contributes to poverty reduction and food security, particularly when supported by robust infrastructure and advisory services. Graeub *et al.* (2016) argue that fostering innovation and strengthening farmer cooperatives are crucial for overcoming systemic barriers to smallholder growth. Terlau, Hirsch and Blanke (2019) identify smallholder farming as the backbone for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Their research highlights the critical need for targeted policies to empower smallholder farmers through improved access to markets, credit, and technology. Additionally, their findings

emphasize the role of smallholders in fostering food security and ecological sustainability, making them central to any rural recovery strategy. Stępień and Maican (2020) provide further insights into the role of small farms in sustainable development, particularly in Central and Eastern European contexts. They argue that small farms contribute significantly to rural vitality and biodiversity while promoting socio-economic resilience in vulnerable regions. Their comparative analysis of smallholder challenges and opportunities underscores the importance of tailored interventions that address specific structural barriers. These insights are particularly relevant for Ukraine, where small farms face systemic challenges such as underdeveloped infrastructure and limited access to resources.

South Korea's post-war transformation exemplifies the principles of sustainable well-being. Through initiatives such as the Saemaul Undong movement, Korea implemented policies that balanced infrastructure development with community empowerment, ensuring that local needs and aspirations were central to national recovery strategies (Kim, 2013; Lee, Lee and Choi, 2019). For Ukraine, integrating sustainable well-being principles offers a multidimensional framework for addressing the systemic barriers facing small-scale farmers, including limited access to credit and underdeveloped infrastructure.

Decentralized governance involves the devolution of decision-making authority to local governments and communities, enabling tailored solutions to regional challenges. This approach enhances public accountability, fosters community participation, and strengthens local institutions, all of which are critical for post-conflict recovery (Rhodes, 1996; Hooghe *et al.*, 2016).

The Saemaul Undong movement provides a successful model of decentralized governance and community-driven development. By combining top-down support from central government agencies with bottom-up initiatives led by local communities, Saemaul Undong empowered smallholder farmers to take ownership of rural development projects. This participatory governance model emphasized self-reliance, diligence, and cooperation, creating a robust foundation for sustainable rural recovery (Choe, 2005; Lim, 2012).

Ukraine's ongoing decentralization reforms offer a unique opportunity to implement similar principles. The establishment of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Interdepartmental Coordination Commissions (ICCs) has laid the groundwork for integrating community-driven approaches into national recovery plans. However, challenges such as limited local capacity and entrenched informal power structures must be addressed to ensure the success of decentralized governance models (Keudel and Huss, 2023; OECD, 2022).

This study integrates sustainable well-being and decentralized governance frameworks to propose a holistic approach to Ukraine's agricultural recovery. By leveraging the lessons of South Korea's rural development experience, it identifies governance innovations that can strengthen institutional coherence, enhance local capacity, and foster resilience. Specifically, the study emphasizes the importance of:

- empowering local governments and communities through participatory decision-making processes (Choi *et al.*, 2020);

- strengthening public administration systems to coordinate recovery efforts effectively (Ndikumana, 2016); and
- developing targeted policies that address systemic inequalities and promote social cohesion (Barakat and Zyck, 2010).

The integration of these frameworks ensures that policy recommendations are not only contextually relevant but also adaptable to the unique socio-political landscape of Ukraine. This multidimensional approach bridges the gap between theoretical insights and practical applications, offering a roadmap for sustainable rural development and ensuring that policy recommendations not only address immediate needs but also lay the groundwork for long-term resilience and prosperity in Ukraine’s rural communities.

### 3. Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to analyze the transformation of South Korea’s agricultural sector and its applicability to Ukraine. The research design combined historical analysis with semi-structured interviews, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter.

The historical analysis focused on the development of South Korea’s agricultural policies since the 1960s, utilizing archival information and literature reviews to identify key strategies and institutional changes that contributed to rural economic recovery. This provided a foundational understanding of successful practices that could be adapted to the Ukrainian context.

A total of 20 semi-structured interviews were conducted between April 15, 2024, and June 13, 2024, with participants from Ukraine and South Korea. The interviewees included:

- Ukraine: 14 experts from Ukraine, comprising 3 academics specializing in rural development, 6 NGO representatives involved in agricultural policy, and 5 practitioners such as local government representatives and smallholder farmers; and
- South Korea: 6 experts, including 3 academics (professors) with expertise in agricultural policy and 2 representatives from NGOs engaged in community-driven rural development, alongside 1 government official with experience in the Saemaul Undong international application.

This distribution reflects the study’s emphasis on understanding Ukraine’s challenges while drawing insights from South Korea’s successful agricultural transformation.

The semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility in exploring specific themes like challenges in small-scale farming development, the relevance of historical cooperative movements, the role of governance and community-led initiatives, and adaptation of the Saemaul Undong model for Ukraine.

The interview data was systematically analyzed to align thematic insights with the study’s objectives, and qualitative data gathered from the interviews played a pivotal role

in informing the analysis, conclusions, and recommendations:

- Analysis and findings: interview insights provided qualitative evidence of the systemic barriers faced by smallholders in Ukraine and the relevance of Korean practices to address these issues;
- Conclusions: data supported the study’s argument for adopting cooperative models and inclusive governance strategies tailored to Ukraine’s context; and
- Recommendations: specific policy suggestions, such as promoting farmer cooperatives and appointing community leaders, were directly informed by interview feedback. For example, one Korean expert noted the importance of success stories in motivating broader participation, which informed recommendations for fostering community engagement.

By combining historical analysis and interview findings, this study offers a nuanced perspective on how Ukraine can adapt lessons from South Korea to rebuild its rural economy. To enhance the reliability of the findings, interviewees were provided with a questionnaire and a concise summary of the research objectives in advance. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, allowing follow-up questions and exploration of emerging themes during discussions (Adams, 2015).

Potential biases were addressed by diversifying the participant pool and ensuring neutrality in question framing. However, limitations such as the relatively small sample size and the challenges of conducting interviews in conflict-affected areas were acknowledged. Despite these constraints, the methodology provides robust insights into the challenges and opportunities for Ukraine’s rural recovery.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. *Ukraine’s small-scale and family farming development challenges*

Ukraine’s small-scale farmers face numerous challenges that significantly hinder their productivity and sustainability. Among the primary issues is the limited adoption of innovative agricultural technologies due to their high costs. The lack of affordable access to these technologies results in stagnation within the agricultural sector. Farmers often struggle with insufficient financial support, which barely covers the resources necessary for the next production cycle, let alone the investments required for modernization. Compounding this issue is the inadequate material and technical base of farms. For instance, Ukraine averages 0.86 tractors, 0.21 combine harvesters, and 0.47 planters per farm — equivalent to only 0.75 tractors per 100 hectares of land (Osypova and Dobrova, 2016). This low level of mechanization underscores the significant resource gap faced by small-scale farmers.

Additionally, the lack of credit mechanisms, such as well-functioning credit unions, and the commercial banking system’s disinterest in meeting the needs of small farms exacerbate these issues. Existing credit unions remain underdeveloped and lack widespread adoption and trust among farmers. Consequently, most farmers cannot access the capital

needed to scale their operations or invest in modern equipment tailored to their farm sizes and production needs.

The systemic barriers extend to resource provision and sales mechanisms. Farmers face challenges due to poorly developed service cooperatives, which could otherwise facilitate resource pooling, marketing, and small-lot sales without packaging. A business environment that incentivizes innovation and new technology adoption is virtually absent. Moreover, additional systemic issues such as insufficient land allotments, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and price distortions between crop and livestock products further stifle growth. Regulatory requirements, such as complex documentation for accessing state aid, and underdeveloped infrastructure, add layers of difficulty (Daniyal'yak, Zvereva and Belkina, 2023).

Bezus and Samofal (2019) highlight that the absence of a modern procurement and distribution network leaves many farmers without avenues to sell their produce effectively. Instead, agricultural goods often spoil due to inadequate storage facilities, including vegetable storage units necessary for maintaining quality and stabilizing prices. This gap in infrastructure is especially critical for farmers transitioning to fruit and vegetable production, which demands significant capital investment in warehousing and refrigeration. Furthermore, state financial and credit support mechanisms remain weak, and long-term lending opportunities are scarce.

Another significant barrier is the lack of wholesale trade enterprises. As Domanska (2017) notes, Ukraine's wholesale agricultural market infrastructure lags significantly behind developed nations. Creating a network of wholesale markets could enhance agricultural production efficiency, improve market transparency, and foster competition. Although some successful examples of wholesale markets exist, they remain insufficient and lack legislative support and modern infrastructure.

Addressing these challenges necessitates reforms, including the establishment of service cooperatives to enable collective storage, procurement, and sales. The cooperative model could optimize production costs, increase profitability, and improve market access for smallholder farmers. Effective cooperatives could also create additional jobs in rural areas, improving living standards and social protection.

#### *4.2. Korean experience to address the challenges*

South Korea's transformation from a struggling agrarian economy in the 1960s to a global economic powerhouse offers valuable lessons for Ukraine. Following the devastation of the Korean War, South Korea adopted a governance-driven approach to rural development, with the Saemaul Undong movement playing a pivotal role. This movement, guided by principles of diligence, self-help, and cooperation, exemplifies how public administration can effectively combine centralized coordination with decentralized, community-led initiatives (Rieznik and Lee, 2024).

The National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF) played a pivotal role, offering multi-purpose cooperative models that provided integrated services, including

marketing, financing, and input procurement. NACF's comprehensive support system empowered smallholder farmers by reducing transaction costs and enhancing access to credit. For example, the introduction of mutual credit systems reduced reliance on informal high-interest loans. By 1971, mutual credit systems had expanded nationwide, lowering informal borrowing rates from 69% in 1971 to 37% by 1979 (AfDB, 2018). From 1971 onwards, the Saemaul Geumgo functioned as a financial entity for Saemaul Undong, promoting regular savings and providing low-interest loans to small-scale businesses. Supported by the government, Saemaul Geumgo helped reduce high-interest loans, boost savings, income, and economic capacity in rural communities. Similar to microcredit banks, Saemaul Geumgo specialized in low-interest loans based on trust rather than collateral, and was owned by villagers democratically, focusing on intra-village lending (Kim, 2013, pp. 26–27).

Korea's government also supported agricultural infrastructure development, such as rice-processing centers (RPCs), which minimized post-harvest losses and stabilized food quality (AfDB, 2018). Public wholesale markets were developed to reduce intermediaries and transaction costs, facilitating direct linkages between suppliers and retailers. Additionally, policies promoting quality management, including GAP certification and product standardization, further boosted the competitiveness of Korean agricultural products.

#### *4.2.1. Institutional frameworks and governance innovation*

Central to South Korea's success was its ability to create a coherent and responsive institutional framework. The National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF) functioned as a multi-purpose cooperative, providing farmers with access to credit, resources, and market opportunities. This was complemented by the Saemaul Undong movement, which integrated top-down policy guidance with bottom-up community participation. The movement's governance system emphasized vertical coordination, ensuring alignment between central government policies and local development initiatives (Choe, 2005; Lim, 2012).

In Ukraine, the decentralization reforms of 2015–2020 have established a foundation for similar governance innovations. The creation of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and the Interdepartmental Coordination Commission (ICC) mirrors the governance structures employed in South Korea, offering opportunities to adapt these models to Ukraine's unique socio-political landscape. By empowering local governments to plan and implement development projects, Ukraine can foster greater institutional coherence and accountability.

#### *4.2.2. Decentralization and community leadership*

A defining feature of the Saemaul Undong movement was its focus on empowering local leaders and communities. Saemaul leaders, elected at the village level, acted as intermediaries between the government and local residents, facilitating project implementation

and fostering a sense of ownership among community members (Yi and Choi, 2013). These leaders played a critical role in ensuring that local needs were addressed while aligning with national development goals.

Ukraine's decentralization framework offers a similar opportunity to strengthen local leadership. The role of *starostas*<sup>1</sup> in rural communities can be expanded to mirror the functions of Saemaul leaders, emphasizing their capacity to mobilize residents, coordinate with local authorities, and guide community-driven recovery efforts. Training programs tailored to enhance the leadership and technical skills of *starostas* can further ensure the effective implementation of rural development projects.

#### *4.2.3. Community-driven development for resilience*

The success of South Korea's agricultural transformation also relied on its commitment to community-driven development (CDD). Villages were empowered to develop and execute their own project plans, supported by financial and technical resources from the government. This participatory approach fostered social cohesion, reduced corruption, and enhanced the sustainability of rural development initiatives (Lee, Lee and Choi, 2019).

Ukraine can adopt similar principles by integrating community-driven mechanisms into its existing planning frameworks. Establishing village-level development committees, modeled after Korea's Saemaul institutional structures, can facilitate participatory decision-making and ensure that recovery efforts reflect local priorities. Such initiatives can also address systemic barriers, such as informal power dynamics and resource misallocation, by promoting transparency and accountability at the community level.

#### *4.2.4. Policy adaptation for post-war Ukraine*

Adapting South Korea's lessons requires contextualizing its governance models to align with Ukraine's unique challenges. This includes addressing corruption, enhancing local institutional capacity, and fostering collaboration between public and private stakeholders. The establishment of performance-based incentives, akin to those employed in the Saemaul Undong movement, can further motivate communities to achieve development milestones.

In conclusion, South Korea's post-war governance and community-driven development strategies offer a blueprint for revitalizing Ukraine's rural economy. By integrating these approaches into its decentralization reforms, Ukraine can create a sustainable and resilient framework for agricultural recovery, fostering economic stability and social cohesion in its rural regions.

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1 Starosta is a position that has appeared as a result of decentralization reform. The person holding this position represents the interests of the villagers, provides communication between the residents of the Starostinsky district and local authorities. Starostas were provided with a number of powers allowing them to solve urgent problems of villagers (see <https://decentralization.gov.ua/en/starosta>).

A comparative analysis presented in Table 1 reveals actionable strategies for Ukraine based on Korea’s experience.

**Table 1:** Comparative strategies for bridging agricultural development gaps: lessons from South Korea for Ukraine

|                        |   |
|------------------------|---|
| Agricultural resources | South Korea’s use of foreign loans and development aid for building fertilizer plants and implementing credit-based input supply systems could guide Ukraine’s efforts to improve input availability. |
| Agricultural machinery | Korea’s provision of low-interest loans and establishment of equipment-sharing networks demonstrate effective approaches for addressing mechanization gaps.   |
| Extension services     | Ukraine could emulate Korea’s systematic extension programs, which provided tailored training and advisory services to farmers.   |
| Storage and processing | Building RPCs and agro-processing facilities, as in Korea, would address Ukraine’s post-harvest losses and improve product quality.   |
| Wholesale markets      | Korea’s modern public wholesale markets offer a model for improving market efficiency and transparency in Ukraine.  |
| Cooperatives           | Adopting Korea’s multi-purpose cooperative structure could strengthen Ukrainian farmers’ market positions and access to credit.   |
| Financial mechanisms   | The NACF’s mutual credit system provides an example of how Ukraine could develop low-interest agricultural loans tailored to smallholders.  |

Source: Authors

### 4.3. Insights from interviews

The interviews provided critical qualitative data, categorized into the following themes:

1. Challenges in small-scale farming: Ukrainian experts emphasized systemic barriers such as corruption, power inequalities, and the dominance of large agribusinesses. These challenges highlight the need for cooperative structures and governance reforms to level the playing field for smallholders.
2. Role of historical and cooperative movements: both Ukrainian and Korean experts agreed on the importance of cooperatives in fostering resilience and economic viability. Historical successes in Ukraine’s cooperative movements align with Korean experiences, suggesting that revitalizing cooperatives could bridge infrastructure and resource gaps.
3. Community leadership and engagement: Korean experts stressed the importance of appointing and training local leaders to facilitate community-driven initiatives. Ukrainian respondents echoed this sentiment, highlighting the potential of grassroots leadership in fostering trust and mobilizing communities.
4. Cultural and structural adaptation: the need to adapt Saemaul Undong principles to Ukraine’s socio-political context was a recurring theme. Korean experts underscored the universality of core values like self-help and cooperation, while Ukrainian participants cautioned that ongoing external support is essential for effective implementation.

## 5. Discussion

This study highlights the critical role of governance, institutional frameworks, and community-driven approaches in facilitating post-war rural recovery. Drawing on lessons from South Korea's agricultural transformation, it identifies actionable strategies for addressing systemic barriers faced by Ukraine's smallholder farmers. Ukraine's small-scale farmers are hindered by systemic constraints, including limited access to materials, equipment, financing, and advisory support. These issues are further compounded by inadequate infrastructure for storage and processing, underdeveloped wholesale market systems, and the lack of effective cooperatives. Moreover, the persistent influence of corruption and power imbalances exacerbates these barriers, making it difficult for smallholder farmers to thrive.

South Korea's Saemaul Undong movement demonstrates how a hybrid governance model — combining top-down policy direction with bottom-up community empowerment — can drive rural development. The movement's success underscores the importance of public administration systems in aligning national strategies with local implementation. For Ukraine, this integrated approach offers a pathway to rebuilding its rural economy while addressing challenges such as corruption, limited institutional capacity, and unequal access to resources.

### *5.1. Governance as a catalyst for recovery*

Effective governance is indispensable for post-war reconstruction. South Korea's transformation was rooted in coordinated public administration systems that ensured institutional coherence and policy alignment. Central agencies worked collaboratively with local governments to implement development initiatives, supported by transparent mechanisms for resource allocation and accountability (Choe, 2005; Lim, 2012).

Ukraine's decentralization reforms have established a framework for similar governance innovations. Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) and Interdepartmental Coordination Commissions (ICCs) can serve as platforms for integrating top-down and bottom-up approaches. However, their effectiveness depends on addressing systemic issues, such as informal power structures and capacity gaps within local governments. Strengthening these institutions through capacity-building initiatives and anti-corruption measures is crucial for ensuring their role as enablers of rural recovery.

### *5.2. The role of decentralization and local leadership*

Decentralization is a powerful tool for empowering communities and fostering participatory governance. In South Korea, local leaders played a pivotal role in mobilizing communities, bridging the gap between central policies and local needs, and ensuring the sustainability of development projects (Yi and Choi, 2013). This approach not only enhanced social cohesion but also instilled a sense of ownership among community members.

For Ukraine, the role of *starostas* and local councils can be expanded to mirror the leadership mechanisms employed in Saemaul Undong. Investing in leadership development programs, particularly those focused on conflict resolution and community mobilization,

can empower these leaders to drive recovery efforts. By leveraging the existing decentralization framework, Ukraine can create a governance model that places communities at the heart of decision-making processes.

### *5.3. Adapting South Korea's lessons to Ukraine's context*

South Korea's experience provides valuable insights into overcoming similar challenges. The country's agricultural transformation, driven by initiatives such as the Saemaul Undong and the National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF), illustrates the importance of multi-stakeholder collaboration, government support, and community-driven approaches. Key strategies employed by South Korea include the establishment of multi-purpose cooperatives, the development of storage and processing infrastructure, and the implementation of extension services to provide systematic support to farmers. Additionally, South Korea's use of mutual credit systems and long-term, low-interest loans significantly improved farmers' access to capital, reducing reliance on informal lending mechanisms.

The findings also directly address the research question by demonstrating how South Korea's agricultural transformation can inform Ukraine's strategies for post-war recovery. Specifically:

- The establishment of cooperative models, such as those developed by the NACF, can empower Ukrainian smallholders by providing shared resources, access to credit, and improved market positioning.
- Investments in infrastructure, including storage facilities and public wholesale markets, can address systemic inefficiencies and reduce post-harvest losses.
- Training local leaders to implement community-driven initiatives can bridge gaps between central policies and local needs, ensuring that development efforts are both inclusive and sustainable.
- Public administration systems at the national and regional levels must be equipped to support decentralized governance and ensure accountability in resource allocation and policy implementation.

While South Korea's governance and development models offer valuable insights, their adaptation to Ukraine must consider the country's unique socio-political landscape. This includes addressing informal institutions, ensuring transparent resource allocation, and fostering collaboration between public and private stakeholders. Additionally, external support from international donors and organizations will be crucial in providing the financial and technical resources needed for implementing these reforms.

A hybrid approach, blending evidence-based national strategies with decentralized implementation, can ensure that recovery efforts are both inclusive and effective. Pilot projects, supported by RDAs and local governments, can serve as testbeds for scaling community-driven initiatives across Ukraine's rural regions.

#### *5.4. Key takeaways and implications for public administration*

An important takeaway from this study is the critical role of ownership and community engagement in fostering sustainable development. South Korea's emphasis on self-help, diligence, and cooperation provides a model for instilling a development-oriented mindset among Ukrainian farmers. By prioritizing bottom-up approaches and involving local stakeholders in decision-making processes, Ukraine can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of its agricultural policies.

The study's findings underscore the need for Ukraine to adopt a tailored approach to agricultural transformation, drawing on the Korean experience while addressing local specificities. For example, building cooperative structures that align with Ukraine's socio-economic context could empower smallholders by enhancing their bargaining power and access to markets. Furthermore, the establishment of public wholesale markets and the promotion of certification and standardization practices could improve market efficiency and product quality. However, these interventions must be accompanied by measures to mitigate corruption and ensure equitable resource distribution.

This study contributes to the broader discourse on the role of public administration in post-conflict recovery. It emphasizes the importance of institutional coherence, capacity-building, and participatory governance in creating sustainable frameworks for development. By integrating these principles into its recovery strategies, Ukraine can not only rebuild its rural economy but also strengthen its public administration systems, fostering resilience and stability in the face of ongoing challenges.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study underscores the critical role of governance, decentralization, and community-driven development in rebuilding Ukraine's rural economy amidst the challenges of post-war recovery. Drawing on South Korea's agricultural transformation as a model, the research highlights how effective public administration systems can foster resilience, sustainability, and inclusivity in rural development.

South Korea's Saemaul Undong movement provides a compelling example of how integrated governance frameworks can bridge the gap between central policy directives and local implementation. By combining top-down coordination with bottom-up community engagement, South Korea revitalized its rural sector, demonstrating the transformative potential of participatory governance. The lessons from this movement are particularly relevant for Ukraine as it seeks to address systemic barriers such as corruption, inadequate infrastructure, and institutional inefficiencies.

Ukraine's decentralization reforms have laid the groundwork for empowering local governments and communities. However, realizing the full potential of these reforms requires targeted investments in capacity-building, leadership development, and participatory governance mechanisms. Establishing village-level development committees and

empowering *starostas* as community leaders can strengthen local ownership and ensure that recovery efforts are aligned with grassroots needs.

At the heart of this study is the recognition that sustainable rural recovery is not solely a technical or economic challenge but also a governance imperative. Public administration systems must not only deliver resources and policies but also foster trust, social cohesion, and accountability. By integrating lessons from South Korea's experience, Ukraine can build a governance model that is both adaptive to its unique context and aligned with broader principles of resilience and sustainability.

Future research should focus on evaluating the implementation of these strategies through pilot projects, exploring their scalability across diverse regions in Ukraine. It should also examine the long-term impacts of governance reforms on rural resilience and sustainability, providing actionable insights for policymakers and practitioners. By embedding governance and community empowerment at the core of its recovery efforts, Ukraine can not only rebuild its rural economy but also lay the foundation for a more inclusive, transparent, and resilient future.

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