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## A Communalistic Approach for the Realization on Gender-Equal Society to Overcome a Social CRISIS

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### Abstract

*Equality between men and women is one of the social questions that will sustain as long as sex-based discrimination remains unchanged. Various approaches have been made from many different aspects to do away with it. All this notwithstanding, it remains a sensitive issue until now, indicating that all approaches so far made are of no avail with immanent limits. Furthermore, there has lately been a transformation in national leadership from government-initiation to the joint participation of the government and civil society, both of which having its own respective role in what may be called participatory reform. Likewise, all social sectors are to join in recognizing, sorting and redressing social issues at hand.*

*From this point of view, "a gender-equal community" is suggested in this study as a means of resolving the structural and sustaining issue of inequality between men and women under communalism. To provide a theoretical background, the details of the proposed community of gender equality are discussed on the basis of communalism. This is to realize a society in which men and women stand on an equal footing. This study signifies a new approach as has never been attempted to tackle the problem of gender inequality, though the model presented here is of an initiative nature.*

**[Keywords]** Social Crisis, Communalism, Gender Equality, Gender-Equal Community, Local Autonomy

## 1. Introduction

In this study, an approach is suggested under communalism in view of the limit institutional approach has in dealing with the question of gender equality at present, instead of an up-down approach intended to change existing systems in search of new social behavior or understanding, it goes the other way around for a bottom-up process towards institutional reform. This approach is more fundamental than institutional in that it tries to realize equality between the two sexes through common understanding or a transformation in the way of thinking. In this context, this study is to initiate a change in approaching the issue of equality between sexes with a proposal for a

gender-equal community movement. This proposal is based on communalism, which provides a theoretical ground for a series of community movements designed to redress social problems.

The question of women remains one of the major social issues until the 21st century. On the one hand, this question has been approached with women as the weak in society as a whole, or on the other hand, for a very long time, women as the weak in their relation with men. Therefore, how to support women in welfare programs in consideration of their weaker social position has been one aspect of this issue. The other aspect is more

fundamental in that the equality of men and women in terms of personality and human rights is in question. At the initial stage, when discrimination of women as compared to men became an issue from the standpoint of personality and human rights, the matter of primary concern were their suffrage and other political rights. Later, as women advanced to society in full with widening opportunities for higher education for them, new attempts were made to do away with discrimination between the two sexes in economic and social aspects as well, not only political as before.

This change has contributed in a considerably measure to enhancing the rights and interests of women at the initiative of the government alone or through cooperation between the government and women's organizations. However, for a number of centuries, efforts to resolve the question of women have been far from being satisfactory with noticeable difference between countries. It was so because the issue of gender equality, to a great extent, is a matter of culture and because efforts to resolve this issue concentrated in the main on institutional changes. In the cultural point of view, discrimination toward women derived from family and social systems over a long period and there were not enough efforts to change it. Any attempt to reform the existing systems or to set up new systems takes a long time to be realized and is likely to touch off cultural crash to make the whole work unproductive.

In Korea, the role of the government and its scope have changed in recent years. The government is no longer as initiative, exclusive and unilateral in locating, classifying and tackling social issues because it now has to share information and work with interest groups representing various facets of society for participatory governance. This change of ruling environment has made old systems impractical in policy programs at national as well as community levels, requiring the government to respond to social demand with all interest groups in consideration[1].

## **2. Gender Equality and Communalism**

### **2.1. Gender equality and the limit of various approaches**

Gender equality is another way to express the question of women. Since gender equality was first brought up as a matter of practical and social concern, it has always been women who were at the center. In other words, the question of women has its theoretical root in the issue of discrimination of women and it is just the same in all related arguments. Still, to some extent, discrimination between men and women has been understood as an issue subordinate to institutional structure of the times. However, discrimination by sex has not always been a dominating paradigm in human history. In the primitive age, both sexes were equal. It was social changes in the later ages that made them unequal.

Approaches so far made to remove discrimination by sex have come through many changes with the passage of time, concentrating on institutional reform. Until now, efforts to make women equal as men in their rights have focused on the reform of systems and therefore, had a limit in that various groups interested in women's question failed to share common understanding. Due to the lack of common understanding, it was difficult for them to make a multi-faceted approach for the sake of institutional and mental reform. Required to help women win equal rights as men is a new mechanism in which all interested parties are represented in full consideration of institutional and mental aspects of the issue. From this point of view, communalism, in which institutional and mental aspects of this question are in due consideration, may be worth discussing as an effective way to realize equality between men and women.

### **2.2. An approach based on communalism**

The participatory government model under study here is for a new type of national governance, which represents views and opinions on a broad basis as to what makes a good government. The participatory model considers traditional bureaucrat as blocking the way to an efficient government, stressing the

participation of low social classes and civil society. Emphasized in this model is the need of a new way of public service and community movement as a tool needed to make the government more efficient. The exchange of views and opinions between public officials and their customers and their joint participation in communalism are considered to be of a great necessity[1].

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From the viewpoint of communalism, how to keep community active in public service is a matter of great significance. Joint production and individual participation are necessary in a broader scope, much more than the bureaucrat[2]. All community members are called on to work together to improve the quality of community life and for this, their participation and suggestions are welcomed at all stages. If community members are to achieve their common cause, they should work hand in hand to locate and resolve problems. Their fullest participation is a must for the success of community devoted to their common interest.

### **2.2.1. The understanding of communalism**

Community is a concept hard to give a clear definition but is regarded as an ideal type of social relation more valuable than society in which citizens are free and equal. It was at the time of the Industrial Revolution and rapid urbanization that such community was in full discussion as having common objective, practice, relation and moral standard[3].

Despite the arrival of an era of reason and industrialization, community begin to grow strong again in reaction to individualism, social split and material-centered phenomena in the wake of the fall of medieval practices. In the 19th century, community was viewed as a valuable blueprint for wishful society in contrast to what it was at that time. At the advent of the 20th century, the simple and monolithic community began to decentralize, breaking into territorial subdivisions[4].

In a further diversion from state-centered society as in the 19th and 20th centuries, the government, business enterprises and civil society cooperate for a new type of governance in the 21st century, the participation of civil society and the progress of local communities, For the efficiency of the government and for better public service in terms of quality, the government, the private sector and civil society work together in a tripartite network. Furthermore, community movement is being expanded as an institution for joint production and cooperation between the public and private sectors. It encourages local residents to join in view of the increasing importance of local autonomy[5].

The organization of community is possible under the great principle of "solidarity and participation" and in community so organized, people at last become free and social individuals capable of expanding their participation to the maximum. As members of community, they enjoy strong sense of belonging, solidarity and responsibility. They are heavily inclined to collectivism in solving problems they have in common. Since they are ready to give up individual interests for that of their community, cooperative efforts are readily available among themselves. The dilemma of collective actions is overcome and the supply of goods for common use becomes possible[6].

In Korea, researches have been made on community from in the main three different standpoints, observing it as a regional unit, as a historical remain that will disappear at the rise of capitalistic production system, and as one of the basic theories of social organization or conglomerate[7]. Quite often and traditionally, the academic world in Korea regards community or the like as kinship society such as

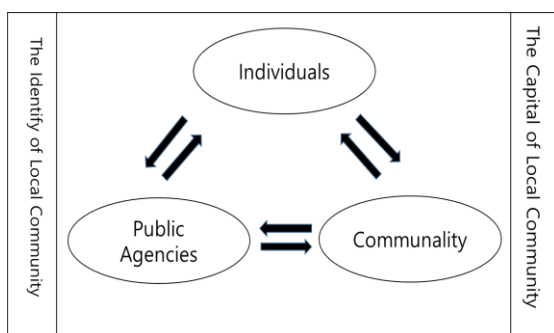
family, relatives, neighbors or villages, and regional or ethnic groups. Residents getting together in these kinship society interact in a sense of oneness or commonness in their areas, identifying themselves closely with their groups in pursuit of a common purpose.

### 2.2.2. The realization of communalism

Traditionally, communalism is characteristic of regionalism, close social ties and homogeneous relation, and is understood as resulting from esprit de corps of the members of regional society[8].

On the other hand, in modern society, this characteristic nature of community does not count for much in itself but is viewed as a kind of active and cooperative network consisting of its members rather than a way of life. In reality, however, due to the lack of civic education on commonality and unstable bonds and trust between interested parties, it is necessary to promote the participation of private or civil organizations and the cooperation of other organizations of various nature in the same region. Local autonomy to the true sense of the word is possible when local residents, business concerns and local governments are ready to work in concert. Social norms and network as well as mutual trust among local residents are essential for local autonomy[9].

**Figure 1.** The types of community network.



Externally, the better way to utilize the strength and activities of community is to allow it to go by itself or in alliance with others in social and political arena rather than attempting to place it under patriarchal or oppressive power of state[10]. Communalism favors a bottom-up type of power relation for common good. For community to be receptive and

democratic, its members should be active in the exchange of opinions and in the follow of thought from bottom to top.

It is important for local society and the government to operate in the form of partnership to achieve communalism. Partnership reflects an active relation of partners of various nature towards the objective they have agreed on, every one of them sharing a unified view on reasonable division of labor and their comparative advantages. This type of partnership features mutual respect, equal participation in decision-making, mutual responsibility and transparency, and individual autonomy. The application of the principles of competitive market to Weberian bureaucracy means the least of new public management, which is realized to the fullest extent by leaving the function of the government to the market completely. Partnership leaves the power of decision-making to the responsibility of the government while the production and supply of service are in the hand of other partners. This means a transformation in which partners, not state, play the role of manipulation and coordination on an equal footing with each other[11].

Partnership as described above has two aspects, "mutuality and organization identity," the former signifying the principle of partnership and the latter the basis of the production of its added value. The effect of mutuality and organization identity expand to the maximum when one partner has what the other does not. This is a kind of "joint gain" attained in synergy effect or value addition, which are out of reach for individual partners.

## 3. A Proposal for the Gender-Equal Community

### 3.1. The significance of the gender-equal community

The changing labor market and the spread of the ideals of gender equality, the question of women is no longer an issue of personal concern. Rather it has now become a social issue in Korea. Efforts have been made for a drastic reform in this respect in government policy and from many different angles. A new office has been set up in the government and

along with this, the First Women's Policy Basic Program went into implementation in 1998 to expand the participation of women in social activities, Laws and systems discriminating women have been changed for women's equality on the same footing as men. Other changes are obvious in all sectors of society. Currently, the second such program is under way with new visions and objectives. However, the direct and indirect discrimination toward women exists in the mind and practice of many people as in the past. The social infrastructure is not yet enough for women to work outside the boundary of family and to make the full use of their valuable capabilities[12].

To promote gender equality is to change the mentality and practice that make women unequal in the use of their ability and in the roles they perform. It is to eliminate discrimination and violence at home and in all sectors of society. It is to enhance understanding and cooperation for them to do what they can and what they want. The free and equal expression of personality and ability is a way to guarantee their individual rights and the quality of their life. The development and utilization of their potential resources will make them equal, socially and economically. Through this will be achieved family welfare at home and the development of democracy at the national, regional and other levels. Society in which men and women are equal is society where the latter is provided with equal opportunities to be recognized as they deserve and to function as they are able to.

In countries where local autonomy is well in practice, all members of society, men and woman, are fairly represented in local autonomy at every stage from planning to decision-making in realization of participatory democracy and customer-tailored public administration, making every policy transparent and fair to all related parties.

In Korea, women are increasingly active in local autonomy, especially for women-related policy and programs. As local autonomy takes root, all residents work together to make equality of men and women a reality in everything in their everyday life. Since local autonomous bodies are closest to the everyday life of residents, all women are encouraged to

take part in making decision on local living environments and other issues of common concern on the same basis as men.

It is not only women's own endeavors but also the cooperation and continued efforts of various forces in local communities that is necessary for the realization of gender-equal society. It is from this point of view that the Gender-equal Community Movement is suggested. This movement is believed to help promote cooperation of local residents to establish facilities for female population, facilitate the exchange of ideas and opinions through local networks, and enhance common understanding on the issue as a whole.

### **3.2. Promotional model for the gender-equal Town**

Community movement needs well-designed and practically-minded planning as well as feasibility and justification to start and continue. All parties concerned should be well aware of its goal to improve the quality of individual life in the framework of overall social progress. Organizational strength and financial capabilities are no less important.

In order for communalism to be realized, its goal must be clear to everyone and all factors essential to its promotion and operation must be ready to be mobilized. The same is true for the realization of gender-equal community.

#### **3.2.1. Objective**

What should be in mind first to promote gender-equal community is the good knowledge of its goal, it is important for all those who work for this movement to share the same idea and the same way of thinking. Only when they know what they are really up to will they be able to work effectively together. The objective of respective gender-equal communities may differ slightly, depending on geographical and other factors. But its ultimate goal will remain the same because inequality between the two sexes is a matter of universal understanding, not system. Other accompanying conditions like environment, local needs, resources available, and so on may well be utilized the way they best fit the individual objectives.

### 3.2.2. Driving forces

Principal driving forces of the gender-equal community movement are promoters, network, and what they do.

First of all, promoters are those who play key roles in organizing the gender-equal community movement. In general, they are interested individuals, organizations and the government. Local residents and local public agencies are the principal promoters of this movement. Devoted to the elimination of inequality between the two sexes, they are supported by civil organizations, professional groups and business concerns.

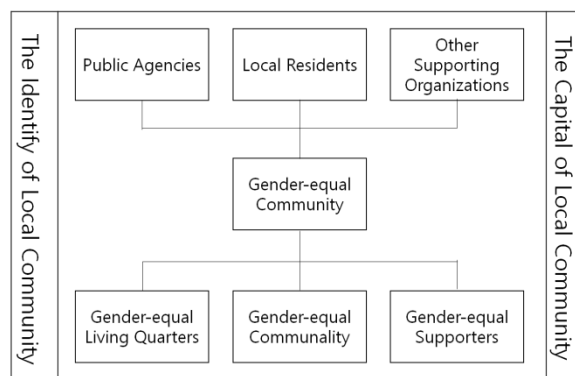
Next, network refers to various channels through which promoters get together to create gender-equal community. These channels facilitate the exchange of ideas and opinions at a low level or function at a higher level in the form of multi-faceted structure to enhance understanding and cooperation.

Lastly, the promoters and their network prepare detailed and concrete programs for the gender-equal community movement, changing old public facilities into new community centers and restoring close neighborhood relations to take care of matters of common concern. These channels will help facilitate the lively flow of ideas and opinions for the common benefit. Individuals will grow interested in what they have in common for good or bad and will learn and experience the way to resolve problems they have in their neighborhood. Thus will be created a new type of neighbor relation in what may be called the remaking of neighborhood. In a nutshell, the new community movement is to renovate public places and facilities as part of efforts to improve the quality of life for all, to organize them to work together for this and other benefits, and to help them to be more sociable among themselves.

Likewise, the process of creating gender-equal community is same as that of renovating public places and facilities as new community centers, organizing residents for stronger dedication to the common cause, and helping them to learn how to work together to realize new society in which men and women will live on an equal footing. For example, the whole work may start from improving public places

and facilities and then move to build up a consensus by way of reorganization and reconciliation. <Figure 2> shows how promoters and their network function to realize gender-equal community.

**Figure 2.** The creation of gender-equal community (promoters, network and implementation).



### 3.2.3. The creation of gender-equal community

Of crucial importance for the effective promotion of gender-equal community are promoters, work process and budget. This movement, to some extent, is rather objective-driven than self-motivated or voluntary. So, it is hard to be successful without systemized preparation made beforehand.

For example, at the starting stage, public agencies initiate the movement to provide groundwork as needed and then recede into background for local residents and civil organizations to take it over and continue on the tracks laid for them. Though may again be assisted by public agencies as the project goes on, it in essence is a project to be carried out by individuals concerned on their own.

Coming next is the step-by-step approach. For instance, at the initial stage, promoters may start to work with local residents in a simple way, handling simple matters of common interest. Slowly, as work progresses, they may get closer together in their relation as the nature of work they do growing more complicated. Budget also requires due care. At the starting point, financing may come from the local autonomous authorities because the local residents may not have quite agreed on this movement yet. By the time when it begins to

roll on itself, other sources of financing must be sought one way or another and the use of volunteers will help reduce costs.

The last important step to be taken is evaluation at all stages to make it sure that the community of gender equality is well in the making as desired. Who will make this evaluation by what standard, and how to use its results also require careful planning. To make the evaluation credible and objective, citizens and civil organizations should have free access to it. Especially, the participation of civil organizations will not only make evaluation itself credible but help draw wider interest from various sectors of society.

#### 4. Conclusion

Gender equality will remain as a social problem until discrimination by sex is rooted up. In view of the universal value of man, this sort of discrimination is a social evil which has every reason to be eradicated. It is for this reason that efforts have been made in many ways for such a long time to do away with it. Successful though it has been to some extent, inequality of women is still a matter of serious concern and is yet to be fought.

This study takes up communalism as a new way to tackle the structural and long-standing question of inequality between men and women in favor of the former. The community of gender-equality as proposed in this study is to realize gender equality on the basis of understanding instead of the change of systems as in the past. Based on common understanding of the issue, this approach is believed to remove the basic cause of the problem with voluntary cooperation of all parties concerned. Since this approach has not been used before and seems to require a considerable amount of time to try, how it may work is yet to be observed.

This approach is of significance in that it is new as has never been tried before and presents a prototype for community in which gender equality may be achieved. It is hoped that it will be discussed and elaborated in comparison with the approaches so far made and will help prepare a new and workable alternative to resolve the long-lasting question

of inequality faced by women.

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