# A NEW INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR NORTH KOREA?

## Contending Perspectives

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# Expected Role of South Korea and Major Stakeholders: NGO Contributions to and Roles in North Korea's Rehabilitation

Scott Snyder

In response to the food crisis of the 1990s, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) for the first time began to accept humanitarian assistance from the outside world. This opening was one of the first cracks in the hermetic seal of self-imposed isolation that the DPRK leadership had sought to impose on its people for decades. It came about as a result of desperately needed food, a situation caused by the failure of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Soviet Union to provide the resource flows that had sustained the DPRK and allowed it to enjoy its relative isolation throughout the Cold War. The scarcity of food in the DPRK gave proof in the starkest possible terms to the lie of North Korea's claimed capacity to stand as an autonomous, self-reliant actor (according to the *juche* ideology).

The famine became an opportunity for the establishment of new relationships between the DPRK and United Nations (UN) organizations such as the UN World Food Programme (UNWFP), as well as a variety of nongovernmental efforts to promote exchange between the two Koreas and between the DPRK and the rest of the world. The famine also provided an initial entry point and opportunity for nongovernmental humanitarian-aid workers to be catalysts for change and representatives of the good intentions of the outside world toward North Korea's people, who had been closed off to the outside world for many decades.

With the advent of a sustained economic boom in Asia and a shift in development assistance philosophy away from direct aid to often corrupt local governments to support through organizations with local implementation capacity on the ground, the 1980s saw the rapid development of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in a variety of roles—humanitarian, disaster relief, service provision, and technical assistance—in response to various crises around the world. The NGO community had developed over

the years initially as an outgrowth of religious-based humanitarian efforts and subsequently as broader vehicles for efficient service provision through subcontracting of government-funded humanitarian and technical development efforts. Over time, organizations emerged with specialized expertise that resulted in the professionalization of service delivery, especially in the areas of humanitarian response and technical development.

These organizations developed as more effective counterparts than governments because they were able to support local efforts inside the target country by developing relationships with a variety of governmental and nongovernmental organizational counterparts at the local level. The development of international NGOs as major players in humanitarian crisis response and delivery of technical services has been given a boost in recent years by the end of the Cold War and the accompanying increase in space for depoliticized nongovernmental roles and functions. The growth of NGOs has been aided as well by the trend on the part of governmental development agencies of supporting NGO service providers as effective vehicles for rapid deliveries of humanitarian and technical resources on the ground (Salamon 1994, 109–22).

The development of international NGO efforts also may be seen as part of the development of grassroots or people-to-people exchanges at the global level because much of the interaction is not necessarily constrained by government policy, although governments as major funders of NGO efforts may indirectly influence the effectiveness of such efforts. The trend of greater space for nongovernmental activities in a sphere outside of the direct control or influence of governments is another development that has gathered speed with the end of the Cold War. These technological developments have facilitated the creation and strengthening of issue-based virtual communities that share an interest in specific issues or developments and can organize more effectively to advocate for attention to the issues about which they are concerned. NGO advocacy with less regard for national borders has thus become one mechanism for influencing government policy, as issue-based interest groups organize to advocate for particular policies in line with their own organizational interests.

In South Korea (Republic of Korea, or ROK), the development of the NGO sector was a natural by-product of Korean democratization and development of civil society. The growth and influence of the nongovernmental sector in South Korea has been a significant part of Korea's deepening democratization, as nongovernmental organizations have played significant advocacy and service provision roles in South Korean society as part of the deepening of democracy. The rise of South Korean NGO involvement as part of inter-Korean relations reflects democratic changes in South Korea and has become an influential and relatively new aspect of the development of the inter-Korean relationship in recent years. The rise of South Korean NGOs has influenced the development of inter-Korean relations, and, as vehicles

for expanded grassroots exchange, NGOs are likely to play an even more important and complex role in the future development of inter-Korean relations in the fields of advocacy, service delivery, and grassroots exchange. This paper will attempt to draw out and highlight some of the likely roles that both international and South Korean NGOs will play in the rehabilitation of North Korea.

## Constraints and Conditions on NGO Roles in the Absence of Diplomatic Relations

To properly define at the outset the constraints and opportunities NGOs may face in working with North Korea, it is necessary to clarify the range of roles that NGOs have been able to play in situations analogous to that which exists with North Korea. The scope and nature of NGO involvement in situations analogous to that with North Korea have been limited substantially by politics on both sides. Only with political support from governments is it possible for NGOs to play an effective role in opening the way for diplomatic normalization efforts (for example, the "ping-pong diplomacy" between the United States and the PRC in the early 1970s).

The story of NGO interaction with North Korea thus far has illustrated most starkly the limits of apolitical humanitarianism (represented by the Reagan-era aphorism, "a hungry child knows no politics") as NGOs seeking humanitarian space to perform their work apart from political constraints have come up against North Korean perceptions that everything about NGO activity in North Korea is fundamentally political. At the same time, in certain cases, NGO advocacy efforts have been successful in heightening political pressure to open roles and opportunities for NGOs to become involved on the leading edge of interaction with the target country. In the case of North Korea, one of the most interesting results of the accumulation of NGO experience in the country is the extent to which the NGO community has become divided and has pursued political advocacy efforts on both sides of the political question of how to manage the future of humanitarian aid work with North Korea.

Although NGOs have been on the leading edge of engagement to provide and support the development of an infrastructure in failed states where political control and order are lacking, NGOs—if both political and financial support are forthcoming—may play important roles in place of governments and in the absence of diplomatic relations as precursors to the establishment of new relationships between governments. NGOs have been on the front lines of engagement with actors or counterparts that have not yet gained formal diplomatic recognition of governments or in situations where political factors have constrained formal governmental roles or relationships with other counterparts. In such highly politicized circumstances, however, the deepening of NGO involvement is usually dependent on the financial sup-

port and political encouragement of state actors, financial or otherwise, to carry out that role. NGOs have very tough going and in many cases may not succeed in the absence of governmental support or in an environment in which financial or political support is otherwise unavailable.

In circumstances where the political support is unavailable for NGOs to reach out and become active at the grass roots, NGOs may pursue advocacy as a vehicle by which to build political support for the government to allow experimental efforts to go forward, to provide financial support for particular activities, or to test the possibility for establishing new relationships. If such advocacy efforts are successful, it may be possible for NGOs to expand the political support for establishing new relationships or developing new programs in areas where prior relationships have not existed. However, in the absence of political support or in the context of a weak advocacy effort with insufficient constituent support, it may become virtually impossible, as a result of existing political constraints, for NGOs to carry out their specialized work.

Thus, in the context of complex humanitarian emergencies or in the case of postconflict situations when a lack of trust has prevented the restoration of formal diplomatic relations (Vietnam, Cambodia, Iran, Myanmar, and North Korea), humanitarian NGOs may step in to play dual roles of provision of humanitarian aid or technical skills as well as advocacy to shape the political space, expand the terms of interaction, and develop the grassroots support that will be necessary to allow them to carry out their work. In the arena of advocacy, however, various NGOs may be primary actors in conflict with each other. For example, issue-based advocacy groups that focus on issues of human rights or democratization may seek to mobilize support to contest interactions supported by relief and development NGOs that could lead to increased political opening or the establishment of new government-to-government relationships. NGOs often are the chief vehicles for mobilizing grassroots participation on such issues, both pro and con, depending on the issue orientation and focus of the specific NGO involved.

## The South Korean NGO Experience with North Korea: History, Advocacy, Action

The South Korean NGO experience with North Korea has included as part of its agenda both advocacy efforts and pioneering work to open new relationships with North Korean counterparts. South Korean NGOs, in a little more than a decade of involvement with North Korea, have faced extraordinary political constraints at various times in their relationships with both the governments of the ROK and DPRK. South Korean NGO roles and responsibilities vis-à-vis North Korea have focused on both advocacy and action in response to North Korea's humanitarian needs. However, actions have been constrained beyond expectations in working with the North while NGOs

have also responded to the needs of North Korean refugees in China and in South Korea. Also, the experience with North Korea has produced advocacy on both sides of the policy debate about the future of North Korea.[1]

## Origins of South Korean NGO Advocacy for Projects with North Korea

South Korean NGO efforts to respond to North Korean food shortages in fact began as public advocacy campaigns to "share rice in love" (*sarang ssal nanugi*) in the early 1990s. This campaign was initiated by South Korean religious organizations that wanted to respond to reports of starvation in North Korea. At that time, the South Korean government opposed citizen efforts to contact the DPRK or to provide nongovernmental assistance. Some groups attempted to provide aid through China, however, and these efforts represented a source of growing opposition to South Korean government policy through the mid-1990s. President Kim Young-sam of South Korea recognized public sentiment and launched a costly governmental humanitarian effort to provide 150,000 tons of South Korean rice to North Korea just prior to local elections in 1995, but this effort did not fundamentally change the extraordinary political tensions in the inter-Korean relationship. It is interesting that these offers, as well as a Japanese government agreement to provide 500,000 tons of rice to North Korea, were negotiated with the DPRK before the massive floods in the summer of 1996 that led to the opening of the DPRK to international humanitarian assistance. (See *Table 1* on page 370 and *Table 2* on pages 372 and 373).

In 1996 and 1997, a range of grassroots activities led by the Korean Sharing Movement developed in opposition to the Kim Young-sam administration policy that restricted humanitarian aid to the DPRK to the single channel of the South Korean National Red Cross. Despite political obstacles, a grassroots public campaign promoted by members of the Korean Sharing Movement, the YMCA, and other South Korean NGOs attracted support from 4 million Koreans and raised approximately $4.5 million in cash, a remarkable feat given government opposition to the movement.

## Sunshine Policy and Expansion of South Korean NGO Activity in North Korea

South Korean NGO efforts to help North Korea faced opposition from the South Korean government until the beginning of the Kim Dae-jung administration's Sunshine Policy in 1998, which marked a dramatic change in South Korea's orientation toward the North and toward South Korean NGO involvement in inter-Korean activities. From that time forward, South

1 For a more detailed description of South Korean NGO experiences with North Korea, see Chung (2004, 81–110).

**Table 1: Aid by the Government of South Korea to the DPRK, 1995–2003**

| Year | Amount of aid (U.S. dollars) | Details of aid |
|---|---|---|
| 1995 | 232,000,000 | Rice: 150,000 tons |
| 1996 | 3,050,000 | UNWFP: $2,000,000 (mixed grain) |
| | | UNICEF: $1,000,000 (powdered milk 203 tons) |
| | | WHO: $50,000 |
| 1997 | 26,670,000 | UNWFP: $6 million (mixed grains 9,852 tons) |
| | | UNICEF: $340,000 (ORS factory cost) |
| | | UNWFP: $10,530,000 (corn 50,000 tons; powdered milk 300 tons) |
| | | UN: $9.8 million, comprising:<br>UNWFP: $4 million (CSB 8,389 tons)<br>UNICEF: $3.6 million (powdered milk 781 tons)<br>WHO: $700,000<br>UNDP: $1.2 million<br>FAO: $300,000 |
| 1998 | 11,000,000 | UNWFP: $11,000,000 (corn 30,000 tons; flour 10,000 tons) |
| 1999 | 28,250,000 | Fertilizer: 1.15 million tons (total: 33.9 billion *won*) |
| 2000 | 78,630,000 | Fertilizer: 500,000 tons; additional fertilizer aid: 100,000 tons |
| 2001 | 70,450,000 | Underwear: 1.5 million articles |
| | | Fertilizer: 200,000 tons |
| | | UNWFP: corn 100,000 tons |
| | | WHO: medicine for malaria |
| 2002 | 83,750,000 | Includes food, medical/health, fertilizer, etc. |
| 2003 | 87,010,000[a] | |
| Total (1995–2003) | 620,810,000 | |

Source: MOU, various years.
a Does not include the 400,000 tons of rice sent as in-kind credit.
Note: FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; UNDP, United Nations Development Program; UNICEF, United Nations Children's Fund; UNWFP, United Nations World Food Programme; WHO, World Health Organization. Some ROK aid arrives in the DPRK through UN agencies; on this table ROK aid through the UN is itemized.

Korean NGO involvement in humanitarian activities toward the North began to expand as private donations flowed and as the Kim Dae-jung government began to provide financial support to some South Korean NGOs for provision of various types of assistance to North Korea. Chairman Chung Ju-young of Hyundai paved the way for expanded South Korean humanitarian efforts: first by the provision of more than 1,000 head of cattle to North Korea in two different donations and, subsequently, through an agreement

to develop and allow South Korean tourism to the Mount Kumgang area in a project that was developed in close cooperation with the South Korean government. Aside from Chung's private-sector efforts, which included provision of humanitarian aid, approximately 20 South Korean NGOs were registered with the Ministry of Unification (MOU) to conduct exchange activities with North Korea in a variety of areas, from promotion of contact among North and South Korean children, to health projects, to technical assistance in the agricultural sector.

Although there was growing interest among the South Korean NGO community in providing various types of assistance to North Korea, a variety of obstacles remained, including harsh restrictions by the DPRK government that came in a variety of forms. South Korean NGOs were very closely observed through either the DPRK's Asian Pacific Peace Committee, which was led by the high-ranking party official, Kim Young-sun, or the Committee for Overseas Compatriots, a branch of the DPRK government that had been most active in promoting United Front activities and pro–North Korean support abroad. Despite significant donations of assistance in a range of areas, travel by South Koreans was restricted, and South Korean NGO representatives were required to be accompanied by North Korean minders at all times. In addition, the level of South Korean NGO monitoring of donations to the North that was permitted by the DPRK was considerably less than even the unsatisfactory monitoring arrangements the DPRK had approved for food and other assistance received through the UN agencies and international NGOs.

As the severity of the humanitarian crisis in the DPRK abated at the end of the 1990s, South Korean NGOs moved away from emergency relief and, as a means of trying to expand access and as a more effective way of contributing meaningfully to the quality of life in North Korea, toward the direction of capacity building and technical assistance projects designed to support North Korea's development. For example, since 1999, World Vision Korea has provided greenhouse equipment designed to support the development and transplantation of high-quality potato strains, and the International Corn Foundation has worked for several years on improving strains of corn that can grow effectively under conditions found in North Korea. Although the implementation of such projects has required more significant inter-Korean interaction, requiring education and training in certain technical areas, the North Korean side has remained wary of expanding South Korean interaction beyond the specialist level or beyond institution-based interaction to allow contact with end users of the services provided.

The price of entry for South Korean NGOs has remained significantly higher than for international organizations or for Europe- and U.S.-based NGOs because of North Korean suspicions about the intent of the South Korean NGOs and concerns that South Korea's presence would negatively influence the North Korean population. Ironically, a further constraint on NGO activ-

**Table 2: South Korea's NGO Aid to the DPRK, 1995–2003**

| Period | Comment | Amount of aid (U.S. dollars) | Breakdown |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sept. 1995–May 1997 | Through the IFRC | 4,960,000 | Flour (3,664 tons), powdered milk (94 tons), blankets (10,000), vegetable oil (1.86 million tons), ramen (100,000 packages), socks (305,000 pairs), potatoes (1,900 tons), radish seeds (4.8 tons), cabbage seeds (6.4 tons), corn (4,980 tons) |
| June 1997–July 1997 | Korean Red Cross, first shipment | 8,500,000 | Corn (41,511 tons), flour (2,000 tons), ramen (150,000 boxes), fertilizer (2,000 tons), corn standard (53,841 tons) |
| Aug. 1997–Oct. 1997 | Korean Red Cross, second shipment | 8,900,000 | Corn (17,100 tons), sorghum (14,576 tons), flour (5,501 tons), vegetable oil (270,000 tons), potatoes (1,300 tons), baby food (96.74 tons), powdered milk (100 tons), children's vitamins (30,000 bottles) |
| March 1998 | | 170,000 | Fertilizer (800 tons) |
| April 1998–June 1998 | Korean Red Cross, third shipment | 9,350,000 | Corn (16,585 tons), flour (13,500 tons), vegetable oil, powdered milk, fertilizer, salt, rice, potatoes, socks, Korean cows, and others |
| Sept. 1998–Dec. 1998 | Additional aid | 11,330,000 | Chung Ju-young: corn, cows[a]<br>NGOs: corn, flour, white rice, powdered milk, sugar, vegetable oil, etc. |
| Jan. 1999–Dec. 1999 | | 18,630,000 | Korean Red Cross: fertilizer (3/30-6/5), (40,000 tons)<br>Through Korean Red Cross: 3.4 trillion *won* from 24 organizations: flour (3,139 tons), corn (4,015 tons), powdered milk (42 tons), sugar (165 tons), seed potatoes (180 tons), vegetable oil (15,845 liters), ramen (9,930 boxes), clothing (215,448 articles), medical, etc.<br>Independent channel (bilateral): 6.6 trillion *won* from 10 organizations; EBCF: medical equipment, worth 1.2 trillion *won*<br>South-North Sharing Campaign: clothing, flour, fertilizer, sprayer, shovel, etc., worth 1.1 trillion *won*<br>Good Neighbors: pasteurizing tank, cream separator, veterinary medicine, etc., worth 33 million *won*<br>JTS: fertilizer (384 tons), dental equipment, sugar (52 tons), powdered milk (30 tons), notebooks, pencils, etc., worth 356 million *won* |

ity came as a result of the inter-Korean summit, which resulted in a dramatically improved government-to-government relationship but also had the effect of marginalizing both South Korean governmental financial support for

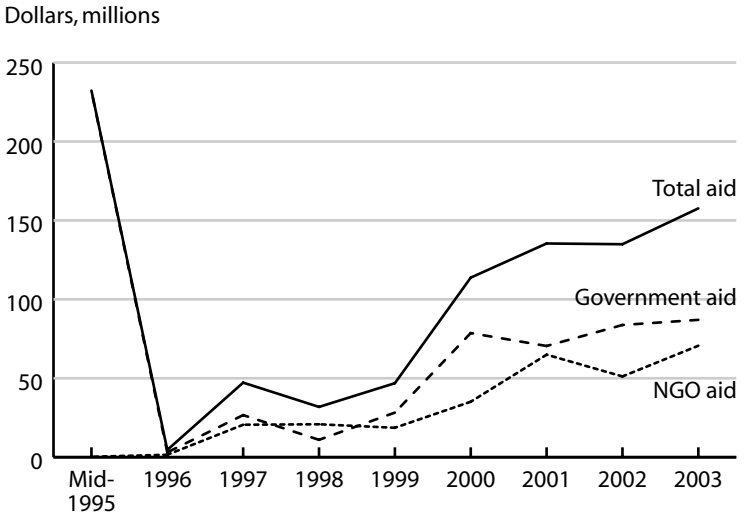
**Table 2: South Korea's NGO Aid to the DPRK, 1995–2003 *(continued)***

| Period | Comment | Amount of aid (U.S. dollars) | Breakdown |
|---|---|---|---|
| Jan. 1999–Dec. 1999 *(continued)* | | | WVK: medicine, greenhouse material, seed potatoes (1.5 tons), clothing (24,871 articles), etc., worth 390 million *won* |
| | | | KSM: clothing (46,500 articles), fabric, medicine, corn (1,000 tons), flour (51 tons), ramen (300 boxes), eggs (5 million), tangerines (585 tons), goats (450), etc., worth 2.6 trillion *won* |
| | | | Korean Rotary Foundation: ambulance, medicine, etc., worth 40 million *won* |
| | | | ICF: 10 types of seed potatoes, worth 1 million *won* |
| | | | National Episcopal Committee for the Reconciliation of Korean People: fertilizer (1,000 tons), corn (3,000 tons), clothing (5,500 articles), shoes (1,000 pairs), etc., worth 791 million *won* |
| | | | National Reconciliation Buddhist Committee: shoes (5,000 pairs), clothing (6,828 articles), etc., worth 207 million *won* |
| Jan. 2000–Dec. 2000 | | 35,130,000 | Korean Red Cross: approx. $94,416 (16 organizations)<br>Independent channel: approx. $256,166 (13 organizations) |
| Jan. 2001–Dec. 2001 | | 64,940,000 | Korean Red Cross: approx. $238,333<br>Independent channel: approx. $465,000 (19 organizations) |
| 2002 | | 51,170,000 | General aid, medical aid, agricultural reconstruction |
| 2003 | | 70,610,000 | Same as above categories |
| Total (1995–2003) | | 283,690,000 | |

Source: MOU, various years.
a Chung Ju-young was founder and chairman of the Hyundai Group; this reflects aid supplied by him during visits to the DPRK in 1998.
Note: EBCF: Eugene Bell Centennial Foundation; ICF, International Corn Foundation; IFRC, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; JTS, Join Together Society; KSM, Korean Sharing Movement; WVK, World Vision Korea.

NGO activities and North Korean attention to South Korean NGOs. Immediately following the summit, the DPRK focused on government-to-government projects with the ROK government at the expense of projects with South Korean NGOs partly because government-led projects involved less risk of contamination through promotion of unfiltered people-to-people contact. In some cases, the same DPRK counterparts who had been working with

**Figure 1: Aid to North Korea from South Korea's Government and South Korea's NGOs, 1995–2003**




Source: MOU, various years.

South Korean NGOs were simply too busy managing government-led exchanges to be bothered with South Korean NGO activities, a situation that led to delays and inattention to grassroots-led technical exchanges or other efforts. Nonetheless, the overall level of aid from both governmental and nongovernmental sources increased (*Figure 1*), partly as a result of the fact that, following the summit, the ROK government also increased governmental support from the Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund for South Korean NGO activities.

All of these factors have led to a certain degree of disillusionment on the South Korean side, but the perceived need among South Korean mainstream NGOs to continue grassroots exchange efforts goes beyond technical assistance to the matter of erecting a political framework for inter-Korean reconciliation. Despite the setbacks and considerable frustrations imposed by the North Korean context, many South Korean NGOs have quietly persisted in their efforts, working together with North Korean counterparts to provide technical assistance despite difficulties, with the hope that hard-won opportunities for expanded grassroots relationships might also lead to a change in North Korea's attitude toward exchange possibilities.

Some of these South Korean groups can claim to have witnessed gradual changes in North Korea and a more practical and cooperative response at an individual level to South Korean NGO efforts, but access has come slowly and at a high financial price, often with little to show in the way of concrete

progress. Some of these projects have led to significant infrastructure and technical process improvements in the North that may, in turn, enhance efficiency and productivity within the North Korean system. But is such progress catalyzing or inhibiting the systemic reforms that are ultimately necessary for a transformed North Korea to survive and thrive? Although there are no definitive answers to such questions, the answer to exactly how soon South Korean NGOs will find expanded opportunities in their work with their North Korean counterparts in effectively promoting humanitarian assistance and grassroots technical exchanges ultimately hinges on this question.

## Refugee Relief and South Korean NGO Advocacy for North Korean Human Rights

Alongside the continuing activities of NGOs that are engaged directly in activity with North Korea is a set of advocacy activities that not only infuses the specialized focus of South Korean NGOs which have taken up work with North Korea but also serves as part of the broader agenda and ideological orientation of the progressive mainstream within the civic society movement in South Korea. This progressive mainstream set of NGOs is primarily focused on domestic political reform, anticorruption, and social renewal efforts in South Korea, but included as part of this progressive worldview is a broadly supportive attitude toward inter-Korean reconciliation and a strong critique of the George W. Bush administration's containment policy toward North Korea.

Activities and exchanges with North Korea have been led by more specialized NGO efforts that are included but are not necessarily at the forefront of the mainstream of South Korean NGO concerns, although those activities are strongly endorsed as part of the progressive political agenda of inter-Korean reconciliation promoted by mainstream South Korean citizens' organizations. These organizations, including the Civil Network for a Peaceful Korea, the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, Women Making Peace, and other groups, are actively engaged in advocacy to support inter-Korean reconciliation and are strongly opposed to President Bush's more confrontational approach toward North Korea. This view appears to have public support from a range of public opinion polls that during recent years have consistently shown widespread support among Koreans for reconciliation and engagement efforts with North Korea.

Meanwhile, another set of seemingly contradictory South Korean NGO activities has developed that focus on resettlement and advocacy on behalf of North Korean refugees who have left North Korea for China and South Korea. This work has roots in the broad South Korean response to North Korea's humanitarian crisis of the mid-1990s. However, because of opposition by North Korean government authorities who oppose efforts by NGOs to respond simultaneously to DPRK government requests for assistance and

work with refugees in northeastern China—authorities in Pyongyang resist working with organizations found to be active in assisting North Korean refugees—the South Korean NGO response has become a two-pronged effort. Some NGOs take the lead in delivery of humanitarian and technical assistance inside North Korea while other South Korean NGOs such as the Join Together Society focus on helping North Korean refugees in China. These service-delivery NGOs have been joined by a range of South Korean activist NGOs with conservative roots or foreign funding (for example, from the National Endowment for Democracy), many of which are opposed to the North Korean regime and are conducting human rights advocacy against North Korea. A range of NGOs, often religiously based and led by individual activists working in China as missionaries in the ethnic Korean-Chinese communities in the vicinity of Yanbian, has focused on saving North Korean refugees and bringing them to South Korea via an "underground railroad" or, because of the PRC's opposition to recognition of North Korean refugees in China, through South Korean embassies in Mongolia and Southeast Asia.

Differences in approach and perspective among various South Korean NGOs have caused conflict in advocacy approaches between groups such as the Civil Network for a Peaceful Korea and NGOs focused on human rights and refugee assistance such as Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights (CANKHR), which has been quite active in human rights–based advocacy on behalf of North Korean refugees and, increasingly, in direct work with North Korean refugees in South Korea. The Civil Network for a Peaceful Korea and like-minded groups have criticized the approach of conservative, human rights–focused South Korean NGOs; they stress that it must be recognized that North Korea's international circumstances have contributed to its isolation, that the use of humanitarian assistance as leverage for political purposes is itself contrary to basic concepts of human rights, and that the political objectives of containment and regime change, rather than real concern for human rights, appear to be the primary motivators of the human rights criticisms of conservatives.[2]

Since 2001, South Korean religious-based refugee assistance efforts have been joined by a more visible and activist set of actors that have tapped into the international human rights community and linked with conservative and activist democracy-promoting counterparts in the United States. These groups highlight the plight of North Korean refugees in order to mobilize political support to increase pressure on the DPRK government in hopes of a political collapse and regime transition. These advocacy efforts by a coalition of conservative South Korean NGOs that wants to promote regime change in North Korea have a distinct base among a strong conservative minority in South

2 See an unpublished thesis by Song (2002), in which she cites Jung Wook-shik of the Civil Network for a Peaceful Korea (www.peacekorea.org/nkright/wooksik.html). Opposing views may be found on the Web site of CANKHR (http://nkhumanrights.or.kr/NKHR_new/index_eng_new.htm).

Korea, but the greatest effects of their advocacy thus far have been to draw attention to these issues in the United States among a developing coalition of religious conservatives and human rights advocates, especially on Capitol Hill. Perhaps the high point thus far and the best example of the influence and relative success of these efforts is the North Korean Freedom Act—which would legislate in many areas consistent with the approach of this human rights–focused coalition—currently under consideration in the U.S. Congress.

In addition, South Korean NGOs concerned with human rights have become more active in supporting refugee resettlement programs in South Korea beyond the initial assistance given for refugee resettlement by the ROK government through the MOU. In support of the basic education program offered by the Hanawon, an MOU-run educational facility for newly arrived North Korean refugees, South Korean NGOs such as the YWCA, Full Gospel Central Church, CANKHR, North Korean Refugee Legal Support Association, and various North Korean defector/refugee support associations have provided supplementary programs particularly focused on helping children adjust to life in South Korea. Programs include job training and job search networks, children's camps, legal support, women's health education, and similar programs designed to ease the adjustment of North Korean refugees to South Korea. According to a variety of MOU sources, development of these programs has been encouraged by the South Korean government, which has reduced the length of the course for new arrivals from three months to two and has spread initial government support for new arrivals over a longer period of time so as to facilitate adjustment to life in South Korea.

## Historical Context of U.S. and European NGO Experiences with North Korea

Compared with the role of South Korean NGOs working with North Korea, U.S. and European NGO experiences, respectively, have been much more limited in their scope and influence toward the DPRK. In both cases, NGO involvement with the DPRK has been more a function of government policy than has been the case with South Korean NGOs; and, with the notable exception of the U.S. NGO response to the North Korean famine at its height in 1996 and 1997, U.S. and European NGOs have played marginal roles in policy advocacy toward the DPRK. Structural differences in the requirements that accompany governmental funding of European NGO work in North Korea and the relatively depoliticized European response to DPRK needs—in contrast with the highly political lens through which the U.S. response has been considered—have thus far made European NGOs much more successful than their U.S. counterparts in establishing sustained programs in the DPRK.

## U.S. NGO Involvement in North Korea[3]

Following disastrous flooding in the summer of 1996, the DPRK government for the first time expressed a willingness to open itself to receiving assistance from outside organizations. In the initial stages, the UNWFP was the primary vehicle through which U.S. government assistance was delivered because of the lack of on-the-ground experience of any U.S. NGO in the DPRK and the political sensitivities associated with the establishment of direct bilateral assistance to the DPRK. Even the initial U.S. government contribution of 25,000 tons of food assistance in late 1996 drew strong criticism from the ROK government because it was made under PL 480, the same mechanism through which food assistance had been offered to South Korea following the Korean War in the 1950s.

Despite the lack of a U.S. NGO presence on the ground, the U.S. government played a major role behind the scenes in pushing the UNWFP to get up and running in the DPRK, even requesting that the UNWFP issue emergency appeals so that the United States could respond in accordance with the Clinton administration's own political objectives as part of the effort to establish a multilateral negotiating mechanism with the DPRK in early 1997. In addition, the UNWFP received unprecedented contributions to alleviate the North Korean famine from U.S.-based NGOs, largely because there was no other mechanism established whereby U.S. NGOs could respond quickly to North Korea's need.

Three types of U.S.-based NGOs responded to the North Korean food crisis: the traditional public-campaign NGOs that sought to raise money through campaigns, conveyance NGOs, and religious NGOs. The public-campaign NGOs ran into difficulties because of DPRK sensitivity to external criticism and its unwillingness to cooperate in showing the worst of the famine to outsiders. Conveyance NGOs foundered on the rocks of political distrust and skepticism about the political appropriateness of U.S. bilateral assistance to the DPRK. Religious NGOs, however, flew below the radar screen and have been able to maintain small operations based on nongovernmental funding streams that have allowed for the establishment of small sustainable programs in niche areas such as humanitarian relief, establishment of bread and noodle factories, and limited educational exchange and technical assistance.

Conveyance NGOs such as Mercy Corps, World Vision, and CARE are the traditional mainstream early responders to humanitarian disasters, and the North Korean food crisis was no exception. Top representatives visited North Korea in early 1997 and began to form a North Korea working group under the auspices of InterAction, an umbrella advocacy group of humanitarian development organizations that worked closely in coordination with USAID and the U.S. Department of State to highlight and advocate for U.S. govern-

3 This section draws substantially from and summarizes Flake (2004, 15–46).

ment responses to global humanitarian crises. These NGO advocates in 1996 also convened a conference, the Musgrove Conference, to discuss the political obstacles to an effective humanitarian response to North Korea. This conference of humanitarian-service-providing NGOs continued on an annual basis through the latest conference in 2001 in South Korea. Some humanitarian advocates pushed for an active U.S.-based publicity campaign and pressed the U.S. government to allow USAID-supported bilateral assistance to the DPRK as a way of gaining a foothold there. This advocacy resulted in the establishment of the Private Voluntary Organization Consortium (PVOC) comprising CARE, Catholic Relief Services, Mercy Corps, World Vision, and Amigos Internacionales. In 1997 this NGO consortium was assigned to deliver USAID-funded humanitarian assistance on a bilateral basis but, for political reasons, was not allowed to move beyond humanitarian assistance and consider development assistance projects.

The U.S.-based NGO coalition—the PVOC—that was eventually formed to operate in the DPRK faced a host of problems derived from the unique difficulties of cooperating with DPRK government authorities in-country and from deep-seated and continuing political mistrust on the part of both NGOs and the DPRK authorities. The greatest obstacle was that all U.S. food assistance was already negotiated between the United States and the DPRK in what came to be characterized as "food for talks," in which the United States sought DPRK participation in multiparty dialogue, participation that the DPRK conditioned on U.S. performance in meeting the DPRK's food assistance demands. The net result was that NGOs had no leverage on the ground to insist on proper monitoring requirements once their groups' representatives finally arrived in Pyongyang. Moreover, DPRK counterparts established an interagency organization, the Food Damage Rehabilitation Committee (FDRC) to manage foreign NGOs and limit as much as possible the ability of NGOs to penetrate DPRK society.

The lack of diplomatic relations and the innate suspicion of DPRK authorities led to the DPRK assumption that requests for information were spying; NGO reports, particularly to the international media and to the U.S. Congress, were indeed regarded by the North Koreans as spying. As a result, the DPRK authorities demanded non-Korean-speaking food monitors and one week's advance notification to prepare for monitoring visits, and they limited U.S. NGO representatives to short-term stays and nonresident status. The PVOC lasted for only three years and dissolved in failure following the politically directed provision of potato seeds in a project that was indirectly connected with the inspection of suspected nuclear facilities at Keumchangri.

Subsequent efforts by U.S. NGOs to work in North Korea have been sporadic. USAID attempts to delink humanitarian assistance for North Korea from the overall political environment have succumbed to the views of hardliners in the Bush administration who believe that North Korea can be squeezed to death through the DPRK government's own intransigence, un-

willingness to respond, and refusal to allow a proper monitoring system for food aid. A proper system would include on-the-spot inspections and assurances that food is truly reaching end users.[4] Under current circumstances, it is unlikely that USAID assistance to the DPRK will continue in any form that would allow space for U.S. conveyance NGOs to reengage. Even the U.S. response to UNWFP appeals has been curtailed by frustrations with North Korean noncooperation and the press of competing humanitarian emergencies in many other parts of the world.

## European NGO Experience and Historical Context in North Korea[5]

The European NGO experience in North Korea has been less influenced by political considerations than either U.S. or ROK NGO efforts, yet European NGOs have encountered many of the same restrictions on the ground as other NGOs. The initial decision among European NGOs to work in North Korea was primarily a response to North Korea's humanitarian appeal in the mid-1990s. However, one condition of assistance from the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO) is that European NGOs must establish local offices on the ground in the concerned country. This requirement meant that the DPRK had to accept a resident presence for European NGOs in order to receive assistance from European NGOs. As of October 2002, eight European NGOs had residency status in the DPRK, and five other European NGOs that had once worked inside the DPRK decided to pull out on the basis of judgments that further humanitarian relief efforts could no longer be justified as effective in meeting the greatest humanitarian needs.

As with other NGOs, the initial focus of the work of European NGOs was on humanitarian relief, but gradually projects have shifted in the direction of technical assistance in the medical and agricultural areas. The European NGOs that remain resident in the DPRK include Campus für Christus (Switzerland), Concern Worldwide (Ireland), Cooperazione e Sviluppo (CESVI, Italy), German Agro Action, Adventist Development and Relief Agency International (Switzerland), PMU Interlife (Sweden), Triangle Génération Humanitaire (France), and Handicap International (Belgium). Despite the practical limits imposed on their work, representatives of those organizations that remain resident in the DPRK are gaining practical experience and building an understanding of the types of technical and development assistance most needed in the DPRK.

Among the European NGOs that left the DPRK were several that pulled out because of their frustrations with the monitoring restrictions imposed by the DPRK. These NGOs—Action contre la Faim, Médicins Sans Frontières,

4 The current system of advance-notice inspections can guarantee only that food has reached institutions; it does not eliminate suspicion of diversion or misuse.

5 This section draws from Schloms (2004, 47–80).

Médicins du Monde, and Oxfam, for example—departed out of frustration with their inability to establish direct contact with individual end users. The feeling among some of these NGOs was that the environment was so restricted that it was often impossible to carry out effectively the intended work that was necessary to meet the greatest humanitarian needs. These organizations assessed that there was little freedom to even determine and respond to the greatest humanitarian needs. Other European organizations, less focused on delivery of services to individuals in greatest need or more focused on technical assistance in specific sectors that did not require close contact with the end user, determined that, despite the restrictions of the DPRK government, it was important to remain and continue the work. They gradually appealed to DPRK counterparts to show flexibility in the implementation of the work. The fact remains, however, that flexibility has been hard-won in an environment where the restrictions imposed on resident NGO representatives remain designed to restrict grassroots contact with the average North Korean.

On the ground, the experience of European NGOs, which initially came to the DPRK with the least politicized motives compared with counterparts in the United States and South Korea, led to starkly contrasting advocacy positions that were based on their respective experiences. European NGOs that found the North Korean environment too restrictive departed believing that humanitarian aid was not reaching the population in greatest need and that the effect of continued assistance was to stabilize the regime by "feeding the dictator" (Schloms 2004, 73–75). These criticisms led in the late 1990s to an intense discussion and review of principles for humanitarian aid in North Korea. European NGOs that have remained in the DPRK argue that "change through rapprochement"—the philosophy behind West German *Ostpolitik*—is the principle that should be applied in North Korea. These NGOs argue that, beyond simply providing assistance, their efforts contribute to better relations between North Korea and the international community, a factor that can open the minds of North Korean counterparts who gain practical experience by working daily with Europeans in project implementation.

## Role of NGOs in North Korea's Future Rehabilitation

What are the likely future roles that NGOs may play as part of North Korea's rehabilitation and integration with the outside world? On the basis of NGO experiences with North Korea accumulated thus far, South Korean NGOs are playing decisive—but contested—advocacy roles to influence South Korean policy toward the North, and they have played significant roles in resource delivery and technical assistance projects that are important to North Korea's rehabilitation. As long as the DPRK continues to gradually expand inter-Korean cooperation and allow greater in-country space in which South Korean NGOs can work, it is likely that South Korean NGOs will continue to

make a substantial contribution, alongside ROK government efforts, to expand inter-Korean relations. However, if the DPRK acts to sour inter-Korean relations or continues to limit South Korean NGOs to only service delivery without opportunities for grassroots interaction (for example, the slowdown in 2002 of ROK NGO assistance to North Korea following the second West Sea confrontation), donor fatigue and frustration will set in even among South Korean NGOs, and the level of support for the DPRK will decrease. To the extent that South Korean NGOs continue to play active roles in promoting inter-Korean reconciliation in ways that draw a positive North Korean response, advocacy and action in favor of broadening inter-Korean relations will continue to receive broad support from the South Korean public.

More specifically, South Korean NGOs can bring to bear considerable resources to promote effective technical training for North Koreans as one means of exposing more North Koreans to information shared by counterpart specialists in many areas. This would be one natural means for South Korean NGOs to powerfully assist the North Korean people through short-term specialized training activities, longer-term stays at South Korean universities, and provision of educational and other resources that might be helpful. South Korean NGOs will be likely to bear the bulk of the responsibility to promote inter-Korean reconciliation through such exchanges. Because there is no language barrier, aid provision via South Korean NGOs is immensely more efficient than provision of assistance via international NGOs and, in the long term, should be the preferred vehicle for provision of technical assistance and training for North Korean beneficiaries of assistance.

The role of European NGOs has been notable because of the absence of other NGOs with a permanent presence in North Korea. Through on-the-ground experience, European NGO representatives have a practical understanding of some of the technical infrastructure and development needs that exist in the DPRK, although North Korean limits on interpersonal interaction still remain obstacles to gaining a full understanding of how to best meet many DPRK needs. However, the political atmosphere resulting from the second North Korean nuclear crisis has constrained even European NGOs to a relatively low level of activity and support for the DPRK compared with what would be possible if the DPRK government were to show a sincere commitment to opening and, in particular, to allowing European and other international NGOs the opportunity to conduct more in-depth training programs and host and support North Korean students for study abroad. It is likely that, in the aftermath of a transformation of the priorities of the North Korean regime, there will be a substantial increase in international assistance and exchange with international NGOs from Europe as well as from the United States and Japan and with other interested organizations.

With the exception of a few religious NGOs whose activities remain relatively quiet, there is no significant U.S. NGO activity with the DPRK. Under current circumstances, U.S. NGO advocacy comprises only several human

rights–focused NGOs that are advocating against the current regime in the DPRK. Nor is there likely to be significant interest in the DPRK among mainstream U.S. conveyance NGOs, absent either a major humanitarian crisis or a regime transformation that would justify the promotion of a much broader range of U.S. NGO activities in the DPRK than would otherwise be possible. Currently the likelihood of U.S. government funding for U.S. NGO involvement in North Korea is highly unlikely, with the possible exception of a resumption of humanitarian assistance in some form. Although many restrictions on humanitarian exchange with the DPRK have been exempted from the U.S. trade ban, the overall political atmosphere still has a dampening effect on such activities and increases the likelihood that there will be no U.S.-government-funded bilateral assistance in either humanitarian assistance or technical assistance. After a resolution of current tensions over North Korea's nuclear weapons development efforts and a fundamental change in the direction and composition of North Korea's leadership, it will be possible to imagine an increase in U.S. NGO activity in the rehabilitation of North Korea, although U.S. NGO roles would likely be relatively smaller and supplementary to South Korean NGO efforts.

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