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국제학석사학위논문

**The Challenges of Humanitarian Aid in Times of Crises:
the Case Study of North Korean Famine**

위급시 인도주의적 지원 도전: 북한 기근 사례를 중심으로

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서울대학교 국제대학원

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아나스타샤 체르니츠키야

**The Challenges of Humanitarian Aid in Times of Crises:
the Case Study of North Korean Famine**

A Thesis Presented by

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Graduate Program in International Cooperation
For the degree of Master of International Studies

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The Graduate School of International Studies
Seoul National University

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Abstract

The Challenges of Humanitarian Aid in Times of Crises: The Case Study of North Korean Famine

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From the early 1990s till 1998 the famine-plagued North Korea lost the lives of hundreds of thousands of its citizens. The regime blamed the natural calamities – floods and droughts – that hit the country in 1995 and left the agriculture that had been experiencing problems before in ruin. The humanitarian operations that followed saw little success as the most vulnerable categories of the population continued to die. In this paper we use Amartya Sen's entitlement approach to analyze the reasons of the failure from both within and without the Democratic People's Republic of North Korea.

The socialist nature of the DPRK explains the existence of the Public Distribution System, which is the main source of food for many groups of the North Korean population. It served as a powerful tool of control over the country, and, as we argue, its collapse became one of the main reasons for wide-spread starvation as many had no other channels to get food. The failure of the government consisted in its inability to respond

timely and adequately to the approaching crisis by producing enough grain domestically as well as purchasing and importing food from abroad by using its foreign reserves.

The system of social entitlement predetermined who had access to food in those dire times and who did not, which put some in direct risk of starvation and death. One of the groups that was hit hardest was the urban working class, who did not have any personal household plots of land and were unable to buy or get food out of the PDS. The geographic factor was also important, with the provinces in the northeast being cut off of humanitarian aid and experiencing acute shortages of food.

The humanitarian assistance to North Korea began in 1995 with the World Food Programme, NGOs and bilateral sector actively participating in relief efforts. However, humanitarians faced constant problems with targeting, monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of operations due to the lack of cooperation on the North Korean side. The monitoring was restricted to certain areas at first, and only gradually did the government allow foreigners to visit far-away provinces. Inspections of institutions for the malnourished were often staged and could not provide precise information on the progress in the country. Besides, there is evidence that massive amounts of food aid were diverted by the military, party cadres and the undeserving for the purposes of self-enrichment or trade in the market.

Keywords: famine, North Korea, humanitarian aid, public distribution system, entitlements

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I . Introduction

1. Foreword

The famine in DPRK that started at the beginning of the 1990s and continued till the end of the 20th century took lives of 600 to one million North Koreans. The famine is a tragic and painful phenomenon that lingers in the memories of people for years to come. Analyzing events of this scale should be done on various levels, including personal accounts of victims and their stories. Now that defectors are opening up about their traumatic past, we can try to reconstruct the picture and get an idea of what led to one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of the last century.

Food shortages that were visible in the country before the famine led to a protracted food crisis, the remnants and echoes of which are still perceptible. Although foreign donors sent shipments worth of millions of dollars to North Korea, many categories of the population were continuously exposed to undernourishment. The most vulnerable groups such as children, pregnant women and the elderly were hit hardest and mortality rates among them spiked.

The first series of floods in 1995 prompted the central authorities to take some measures to protect its citizens, but, unfortunately, the delayed response was ineffective. Besides, the international community was unable to detect the first signs as North Korea does not welcome foreign scrutiny on its territory. Even when the aid arrived, Pyongyang regarded official relief agencies with much suspicion and mistrust, hindering the distribution and

monitoring of assistance at every turn. Aid diversion precluded the targeted groups from receiving food and aggravated the already complicated state of affairs.

Naming natural calamities the true cause of famine allowed the North Korean government to clear its name and appeal for assistance from the international community. However, the DPRK's problems seem to be chronic rather than incidental. In this paper we are going to argue that the unsuccessful economic policies in industry and agriculture along with a socialist mechanism of food distribution have contributed to the collapse of production and supply. Therefore, the origins of the famine should be looked for in the regime itself.

2. Research question

The aim of this study is to illuminate the role of the state and the international community in alleviating humanitarian catastrophes through a case study of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Based on the in-depth analysis of internal politics of North Korea and its external relations this study aims to give answers to the following two questions:

1. What role did the government play in failing to prevent the famine and mitigate its effects?
2. Why has foreign assistance failed to address the challenges of sustainable development and have a significant impact on humanitarian challenges in North Korea?

This paper is divided into seven sections, organized as follows: the first part introduces the aims, objectives and research questions of the thesis. Then we are going to examine the literature on North Korea, its politics, economics and society across a variety of approaches of different scholars before having a closer look at the interpretation of famine in the DPRK to see what explanations of the crises have been proposed. In chapter III we will pay special attention to the analytical framework of this thesis and set forth the entitlement approach which we are going to apply as well as present the methodology. Chapter IV gives us the background information on the famine, covering the state of agriculture, finances and the initial response of the North Korean government to food shortages. Chapter V goes on to conduct an analysis of the public distribution system and highlight the challenges it faced that lead to widespread malnutrition and starvation. Chapter VI evaluates the international humanitarian effort and considers its role in the alleviation of misery in North Korea. Finally, we conclude the paper by summarizing the main points touched upon in previous chapters.

III. Analytical Framework

1. Theoretical Framework

The intention in writing this paper is threefold: examine the accounts of the famine and reconstruct the picture, review government policies and their effects, and construct a political economy of the aid relationships that North Korea tried to build up. In order to do that, the following theoretical framework is applied.

First of all, to understand the domestic challenges that provoked the famine, we are going to apply the entitlement approach, a part of the capabilities framework pioneered by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen. The capabilities framework is based on the idea of basic needs, but it also means that well-being of people depends on what they can be and can do instead of solely what they possess, including both subjective and objective sense of being well-off.

To explain the capability approach, we need to look at the means and the ends of well-being and development. Typically, only the ends are considered important, while means are used to attain an even higher level of development. However, according to Sen, capabilities, or what can be potentially done, and achieved functionings, or what people decide to do with their potential, are clearly distinguished. What Sen emphasizes is a notion that people should enjoy the freedoms (capabilities) to live their life to their full potential, only then will they be able to decide what to do with these freedoms based on their own vision of a good life. It is clear that the capability approach belongs to the

liberal school of thought as it stresses an essential value of individual freedom and rights (Kymlicka 2002; Swift 2001).

This approach considers “concentration on freedoms to achieve in general and the capabilities to function in particular” (Sen 1995). Sen strives to assess government policies by looking at the effect they have on citizens’ capabilities: when evaluating health he asks whether they have fresh water, access to medical institutions etc.; when evaluating nutrition, he asks whether they have enough food supplies and entitlements. Consequently, this approach is comprised of a variety of factors such as financial resources, political, social and cultural practices, social institutions, traditions, etc., presenting a comprehensive and integrated vision on the problem.

Entitlements are a “set of alternative commodity bundles that a person can command in a society using the totality of rights and opportunities that he or she faces” (Sen 1984). As it is a descriptive concept with some normative connotation, it does not coincide with a notion of the right to food (Edkins 1996:559).

An entitlement set is the scope of goods and services that they are able to get in exchange for their endowments that is assets and resources via exchange entitlement mappings. Sen categorizes four main legal sources of food: “production-based entitlement” (production of food), “trade-based entitlement” (purchase of food), “own-labor entitlement” (labor for food) and “inheritance and transfer entitlement” (receive food from other people). In case a person’s entitlement set fails to secure them enough food for sustenance, he or she may

starve. Moreover, groups of people having the same job or living in a certain area are likely to face famine if their entitlements decline at the same time.

An essential element of the entitlement approach to analyzing famine is the shift of the emphasis on food supplies to the failure of certain groups to get access to food. Thus, the crucial insight of Sen's work is that food insecurity mostly hits those who are unable to acquire enough food regardless of food availability, which means that a famine can take place in a region with decent food supplies and stable markets. Another vital point is that famine may be provoked by "exchange entitlement decline" which is the weakening of exchange value of endowments for food, for example, when severe floods or droughts destroy the harvest or the prices of the commodity produced by the individual dramatically declines (Sen 1981:435).

Furthermore, the entitlement failure can occur if food production for personal consumption goes down, meaning a direct entitlement failure, or the food exchange rate deteriorates, meaning a trade entitlement failure (Sen 1981). It essential to understand the difference when analyzing who faces the risk of starvation should there be any changes in the economy. While the direct entitlement failure results from a drop in the production levels of farmers, the trade entitlement failure arises among those engaged in the production of services and goods other than food when the amount of available food drops or they are no longer able to exchange it on previously existing terms. All in all, we need a comprehensive and inclusive evaluation of the famine and policies to address it.

2. Methodology

The paper applies qualitative research models, and the main research method in this model is the literature review. The author has used various types of literature to write this thesis. The first source was the official reports and archives of the multilateral international organizations dealing with North Korea, evaluation papers indicating the effectiveness of aid programs and activities of relief agencies and NGOs. Among the organizations mentioned in this work are the South Korean NGO Good Friends, Médecins sans Frontiers, World Food Programme, Food and Agricultural Organization, United Nations Development Program, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, International Federation for Human Rights.

When choosing international organizations to be reviewed, the main criteria were their involvement in food aid programs in the 1990s and their commitment to resolve development issues. Chapter VI analyzes the response of the international humanitarian community to the chronic food shortages in North Korea and the challenges they had to face. The WFP, the main multilateral humanitarian organization in North Korea since 1995, presents an array of official papers documenting the work of the organization, the monitoring regime and the interaction with the local personnel that helps to reconstruct relief operations and point out the problems that they had while working across the country. UNDP publish their reports on agricultural recovery and environment protection

in North Korea. International Federation for Human Rights issue their research on the persistent violation of economic, social and cultural rights in DPRK.

The author has also examined the reports and papers of South Korean agencies and institutions engaged in the research on North Korea to get a clearer picture of the situation including Korea Development Institute (KDI), Korea Institute for National Unification (KINU), Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP), and Korean Ministry of Unification. All these South Korean Institution provide valuable background on North Korea in terms of its history, society and economic development. To access them I used their websites which host an assorted collection of articles, round table protocols, official reports and statistical databases.

The press is another valuable source of information for the research on the North Korean famine. The BBC, Chosun Ilbo, Donga Ilbo, Joongang Ilbo, ITAR-Tass, Reuters, Yonhap articles were used to monitor the actions and motives of the donors and examine the attitudes of the international community to the events unfolding in North Korea. As these newspapers and news agencies are from different countries, we were also able to note differences in approaches towards presenting the situation in the famine-stricken DPRK. For instance, the right-wing South Korean newspaper Chosun Ilbo narrates about the foreign to North Korea as well as about its domestic economy and its downfalls.

Another research method is the interviews and surveys taken by North Korean defectors and refugees. The Korean Buddhist Sharing Movement carried out a series of refugee interviews on the breakdown of the food distribution system; Good Friends conducted a

survey about the most severely affected groups of the North Korean population. These accounts help to see the human face of this tragedy and are often the only source of information about certain locations, government actions and conditions on the ground given the closed nature of the North Korean state.

Last but not least, the works of international scholars describing the political system, economic development and social framework of the DPRK gave useful insights into the realities across the border. Some of the books and articles published in academic journals that we have used were written by internationally recognized experts on North Korea: Andrei Lankov, Charles Armstrong, Adrian Buzo, Victor Cha, Bruce Cumings, Nicholas Eberstadt and others. Besides, a number of authors present their accounts on the famine: Woo-Cumings, Natsioa, Snyder, Smith, Noland, Haggard, S. Lee. These works have helped to get a general understanding of the famine and the existing perspectives on its origins and roots.

II . Literature review

Taking into account that North Korea is a closed and secluded society, there are not many works dedicated to its internal problems and policies due to a lack of official information provided by Pyongyang and the issue of its trustworthiness. Nevertheless, there have been several attempts to explain the famine in North Korea and its causes based on main approaches and theories of international relations. However, most works explaining Pyongyang's actions are predominantly based on the international security discourse, which limits the ways in which we could explain one of the most horrendous events of the 20th century.

The proponents of conventional approaches to North Korean politics argue that this is the only way to analyze this country's behavior as there is not enough information available. As a result, well-established theories of international relations are mostly used to explain North Korea and its actions. In his article "Hastening Korean Reunification" Nicholas Eberstadt explores this securitization prospective, which has already become common and widely accepted when talking about North Korea. As decision-making there is often puzzling and nontransparent in the times when the public can access most information related to their government's activities around the world and when democratic regimes try to observe transparency norms. This creates an atmosphere of mistrust and a feeling of uncertainty about DPRK, which contributes to security dilemmas and spurs arm racing. Furthermore, Pyongyang's actions are usually considered in a worst-case scenario: a good example of it is an assumption that facilities and technologies used for producing

fertilizers can be used to develop biological weapons. Such securitization paradigm states that military power is the main point of analysis of Pyongyang's policies, and all other spheres such as economy, society and culture should be addressed in a military context. Thus, North Korea is depicted as a mad state with irrational leadership and unpredictable line of action.

In his article "The Conventional Military Strength of North Korea: Implications for Inter-Korean Security" Edward A. Olsen argues that North Korea is a "garrison state" that is ready to go to war with its neighbors and rivals. For that purpose it has one of the biggest armies in the world and spends about 30 percent of its budget on defense. However, having compared North and South Korea's military expenditure we can conclude that while its army has more manpower, it experiences serious trouble with modernizing its technology and equipment due to the low level of per capita spending. As for the volume of North Korean forces, they are also usually overestimated. While it is true that North Koreans may be more prepared in case hostilities begin as all of them take special military training, it is crucial to remember that the military are regularly engaged in economic activities such as construction works or harvesting crops. Thus, we can say that the participation of the military in civilian economic activities is also counted in the military expenditure.

What is more, this "bad" paradigm portrays North Korea as a malignant violator of human rights. In 1999 the US Department of State published a report called "Democratic People's Republic of Korea Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998", where

it accused the North Korean leadership of perpetrating grave crimes against its people like torture, arbitrary arrest, forced resettlement, denial of the right to free speech, assembly and privacy. As has been mentioned before, we have difficulty substantiating many of these claims as their primary source is North Korean defectors, however, humanitarian organizations have also provided some valuable insight information on the life of North Koreans.

The “bad” thesis is, hence, contradictory: people oppressed and controlled by the regime appear to be ready to go to war including women, children and the elderly. To explain this inconsistency the proponents of the view state that the state propaganda has worked effectively in brainwashing the people and the oppressive mechanism is crushing any dissent that surfaces among them. Instead of overthrowing their authoritarian leader, they would rather support and defend him should a military conflict take place.

Nicholas Eberstadt argues that North Korean regime and their nuclear program are closely interrelated; therefore, he equals the regime to the nuclear issue saying the former relies heavily on the latter. Since Pyongyang is not showing willingness to perform prompt unification with its southern neighbor on their conditions, the author suggests that the only viable way left is coercion, which implies a war on the Korean peninsula.

Another, “softer” version of this thesis proposed by Pedro Almeida and Michael O’Hanlon in their article “Impasse in Korea: A Conventional Arms-Accord Solution” states that DPRK uses its nuclear program to get aid from the West by blackmailing and staging provocations. Almeida and O’Hanlon do not regard North Korea as a country

with superior military forces or absolutely uncompromising, doubting their capability to invade South Korea and contemplating the possibility of talks between the North and the South. Nevertheless, the authors find DPRK an unreliable partner and, consequently, have difficulty coming up with a plan of confidence-building measures.

The “mad” paradigm is different from the “bad” one in that it pictures North Korea as an irrational and unpredictable player, which stems from the ill-natured character of its regime, while the former presumes it is a rational instrumental actor. Besides, the “mad” thesis presumes that North Korean politics and society are turbulent and primitive, and the “bad” paradigm blames the authorities and their ill intent. Aiden Foster-Carter states that it has failed to establish strong economic cooperation with the neighbors because of its irrational behavior and refusal to follow international norms. Kyongmann Jeon in his article “The Likelihood and Implications of a North Korean Attack on the South” agreed with it and added that Pyongyang should be more cautious when pursuing its policies in the international arena.

The extreme version of this paradigm asserts that acts of inhumane violence such as cannibalism are taking place inside DPRK. The problem with most of these claims is that they are unsubstantiated as there is little systematic investigation to support it. An example of such controversial claims is an article in the Economist’s July 10-16 1999, where a reporter is said to meet a family that claims their neighbor had given birth to a baby and shortly after that had cooked it.

A softer perspective of the “mad” thesis argues that as there is little reliable data on North Korea, it is almost impossible to carry out any solid and meaningful research on it. Robert Scalapino in “North Korea after Kim Il Song”, for instance, states that North Korea is a “mystery”, and although we have some information about it, it is not enough for a thorough study. Thus, this view denies that we can obtain any reasonable knowledge about this country.

The securitization approach reflects certain aspects of DPRK and its politics. It can be unpredictable as implied by the “mad” paradigm and it can be quite predictable as the “bad” paradigm suggests. However, this view distorts and misrepresents the realities of North Korea. Among the main issues with this approach are the absence of research based on well-documented evidence, ignoring the data that may contradict the widely-acknowledged perspective, the rigidity of the assumption and the persevering belief that the North Korea is an unchanging and belligerent player, and the only way to change it is to uproot the vile regime.

The 21st century has seen an increased access to North Korea, and it would only be logical to expect more studies carried out according to conventional principles of scholarly inquiry. With some research being conducted on the issues of the future of North Korean economy, the perspectives on DPRK’s past remain largely unchanged and uncontroversial. For example, there exists an unquestionable consensus explained by Noland in “Why North Korea Will Muddle Through” that the famine was the result of Pyongyang’s inefficient domestic policies and the shortage of material inputs, which was

reflected in the statement from “Thematic Roundtable Meeting on Agricultural Recovery and Environmental Protection” between the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the North Korean government. Most donors blamed the regime’s unwillingness and inability to make alterations in their policies, not taking into account the ineffectiveness of the external assistance as well.

Another problem is that the information that contradicts the framework tends to be left out. As a result, the data provided by humanitarian organizations working in North Korea is often not examined properly, which precludes us from getting a more balanced view on DPRK. In addition, if a country is seen as hopelessly mad or inherently evil, this approach is likely to put obstacles in the way of sound research. Thus, any diplomatic efforts or negotiations with North Korea become pointless because its interests and the interests of the international community cannot be harmonized. The only options left for policymakers with this approach are inertia if they believe nothing can be done with North Korea or confrontation if they think that the military way is all there is.

As we have mentioned before, there are not many comprehensive studies dedicated to the North Korean famine that would not simply blame the regime for not addressing the situation, but also consider other aspects and possible solutions such as humanitarian assistance and the involvement of donors, the severity of natural disasters that happened at the time, in other words, literature that would explore both internal and external sources of the problem. Here I would like to list three books that have contributed greatly

to this research and that have expanded the scope of the study on the North Korean famine.

First of all, it is the book called “Hungry for Peace: International Security, Humanitarian Assistance and Social Change in North Korea” by Hazel Smith, who takes the “food availability” approach. Smith is a strong proponent of humanitarian diplomacy, claiming that humanitarian work both helps to alleviate suffering and save people’s lives as well as push the government towards policy changes. By creating “humanitarian space” we can both get access to those in need and make an impact on societies, create a more responsive environment and open countries. Thus, DPRK has come a long way to incorporate the principles of human security with the help and assistance from humanitarian organizations posted there.

To illustrate her claim, she argues that the years from 1996 to 2001 saw the rise of humanitarian action in North Korea that turned out to be a more effective tool in fostering constructive engagement with Pyongyang than diplomatic efforts. The activities led United Nations’ World Food Programme are a case in point. Due to the humanitarian purpose of their mission, the workers were allowed to visit more than half of the country, conduct nutritional surveys, carry out food supply assessments and establish personal contacts with the population. On the other hand, after 2001 when aid community started to face difficulties and no visible progress was made in the humanitarian field, a series of failures in constructing relations with North Korea followed. The US named troubles in monitoring as the main reason to cut its share of aid, Japan ceased assistance with the rise

of abduction cases in mid-2002, and the European Union's stance on human rights in DPRK left its humanitarian efforts without due support. So as the model of constructive engagement proposed by the UN ran out of steam, in 2005 the WFP was requested to leave North Korea. Smith also urges that a rational humanitarian approach should be applied when we try to understand North Korea. Instead of condemning it with stark adjectives, it is better to engage in academic research based on whatever information we have and refrain from stigmatizing it.

Another important work is "The Great North Korean Famine: Famine, Politics and Foreign Policy" by Andrew S. Natsios. Among its many valuable points, this book regards the famine from the human side, showing what other works might have missed opting for a high-profile account narrowed down to deliberations of sanctions and arms – the side of the story seen from the point of view of ordinary people. He includes testimonies of refugees, description of the prevailing situation and the actions of the government that are compelling enough.

Having witnessed the crisis himself (Natsios had numerous visits to DPRK and the bordering provinces of China), he had come up with his own view on the responsibility for one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of the twentieth century. He states that it is not only the regime that should be blamed for its inability to prevent and stop the crisis, but also the international community, namely, donors such as the USA that stepped in once the peak of the famine had passed in late 1996. The author levels criticism at the American government for manipulating food assistance and using it to get concessions

from DPRK, labeling this attitude unjustifiable as the ones who suffer in the end are innocent citizens who have little influence on their government's policy choices. He also criticizes humanitarian aid officials who did not act after having seen the evidence of starvation which could not be covered up even by the reticent North Korean regime.

Finally, an essential addition to recent scholarship on North Korea is a work of Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland "Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform". The authors have meticulously revised all available information from sources ranging from NGO reports, government statements and testimonies of witnesses. The book states that the floods that hit North Korea in 1995-1996 played an insignificant role in deteriorating the state of the agriculture as its decline had started before the natural disaster hit. The regime made some efforts to mitigate the crisis by strengthening ideological indoctrination in the cooperative farms, outlawing trade in food and restricting food consumption, but they all proved to be futile. As shown by the researchers, despite all these measures, grass-root marketization is taking place from below. Still, the system has not undergone any radical changes in general.

The book goes on to show the government that was not purposely intending to starve a large number of North Koreans but presumed it could sacrifice thousands of lives to keep control over the country. This is important because, from Kim's point of view, any relaxation of the regime could lead to its collapse, and then those responsible for allowing the famine to take its toll would face criminal charges. Pyongyang did not issue appeals to relief agencies on time since it would indicate the failure of its self-sufficiency claims on

the background of the unfolding nuclear crisis. In the end, Kim chose to abandon the “earthly paradise” myth and began to exaggerate the extent of the damage and material loss to get more foreign aid. Haggard and Noland also demonstrate how food supplies were deliberately limited in some parts of North Korea that were deemed expendable.

An important part of their work is dedicated to the problem of aid diversion to the military, political elite and the other privileged. According to them, the survival of the regime and personally Kim’s family was ensured through supplying “core groups” with domestically-grown grains. Thus, those who could pose a potential threat to the regime in case they became dissatisfied were well-fed and relatively satisfied with the existing aid distribution in an environment of police terror and information control. It is also important to note that isolating DPRK would be, for the point of view of the writers, be both immoral and impractical. To prove it, authors show that food assistance has been heavily influenced by political considerations of the donors, especially China and South Korea. They claim that these countries did not wish to witness the collapse of North Korea, which might explain their willingness to keep sending aid regardless of the sentiments in the West or the US.

All in all, although the existing literature on North Korea and the famine that took place in the 1990s does attempts to give answers to the questions of who or what caused the famine as well as to who failed to stop it, the approaches undertaken by the researchers consider mainly one side of the issue, blaming either the vile nature of North Korean state, inaction of humanitarian organizations or donors driven by political considerations. In

this research we will try to give a comprehensive overview of the causes of the famine and the factors that contributed to one of the biggest humanitarian tragedies of the 21 centuries.

IV. Background

1. Socialist Agriculture in North Korean Context

After the Korean War, Kim Il-sung consolidated total control over his rivals and decided to follow Stalin's policy of prioritizing heavy industry over others. This meant that large masses of laborers living in rural areas were mobilized into the industrial workforce, considerably downsizing the scope of agricultural sector and complicating the task of achieving food self-sufficiency. Promoting heavy industry resulted in a rather incongruous economic structure: in the beginning of the 1990s as many as 61 percent of North Koreans were residents of urban areas while the per capita income remained somewhat low. Mere 31 percent were involved in agricultural production, 41 percent in industry and the rest in services and other activities (UNDP 1998). This data demonstrates that scarcity of food could be felt not only in the countryside, but in cities and towns as well.

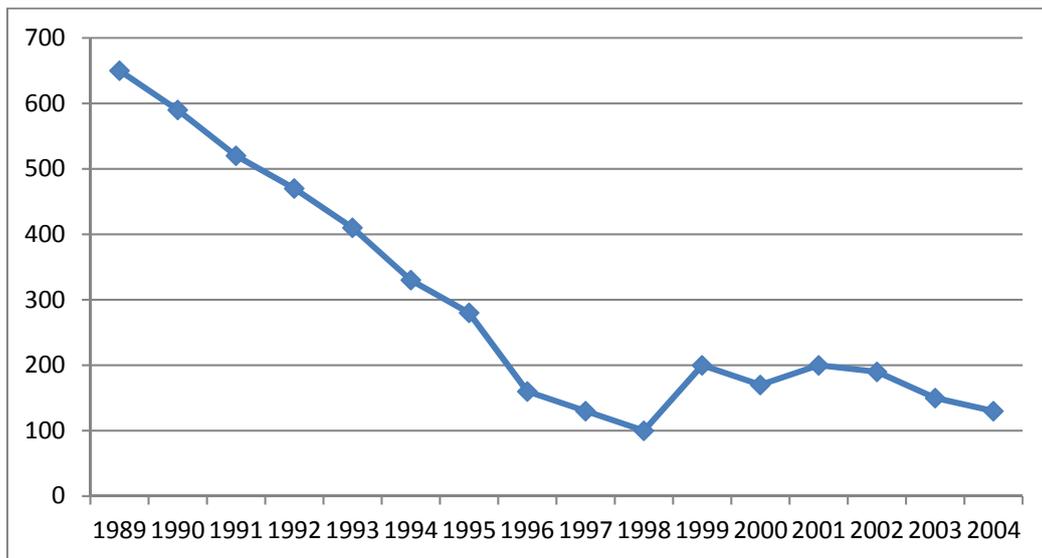
Interestingly enough, North Korea's natural resources endowment became a double-edged sword. At the time of the Korean War the South endowed with rice fields and plains provided food, while the North with its mountainous landscape and relatively more severe climate conditions. Right before the War, the land reform saw a sharp decline in agricultural output, which led to frequent food shortages. To address them, the government restricted private trade in food and launched a series of grain seizures in the countryside. Such actions could not help but create a certain historical memory among

farmers, who, remembering how the regime took their harvest, began to conceal their crops, trade food at the black market and barter.

After the War, the government initiated collectivization to give impetus to the industry. Production was strictly planned and portioned; the state embraced the role of the market, tasking itself with grain distribution, too. Food security was seen through the lens of self-sufficiency at every level – the national, the provincial and the county one (S. Lee 2003). Consequently, the food distribution system was decentralized as the local government had the authority over demand and supply. Moreover, since nonagricultural households could obtain food via rationing, also known as the public distribution system, for city dwellers it remained their only food channel.

In the 1960s the North Korean government adopted the “four modernizations” that included mechanization, electrification, irrigation and chemicalization, producing a highly input-intensive agricultural system. The crops received a necessary boost but were increasingly dependable on the availability of these inputs that were gained from domestic industry or external trade. Fertilizers are a case in point. They were produced in North Korea, however, due to its scarce oil reserves, Korea was constantly reliant on petrochemical and oil imports. However, as the boom harvest years had passed and the manufacturing sector deteriorated, fertilizer consumption shrank considerably (see **figure 1**).

Figure 1. Consumption of NPK Fertilizer in North Korea, 1989-2004 (in thousands of tones)



Source: FAO, Global Information and Early Warning System

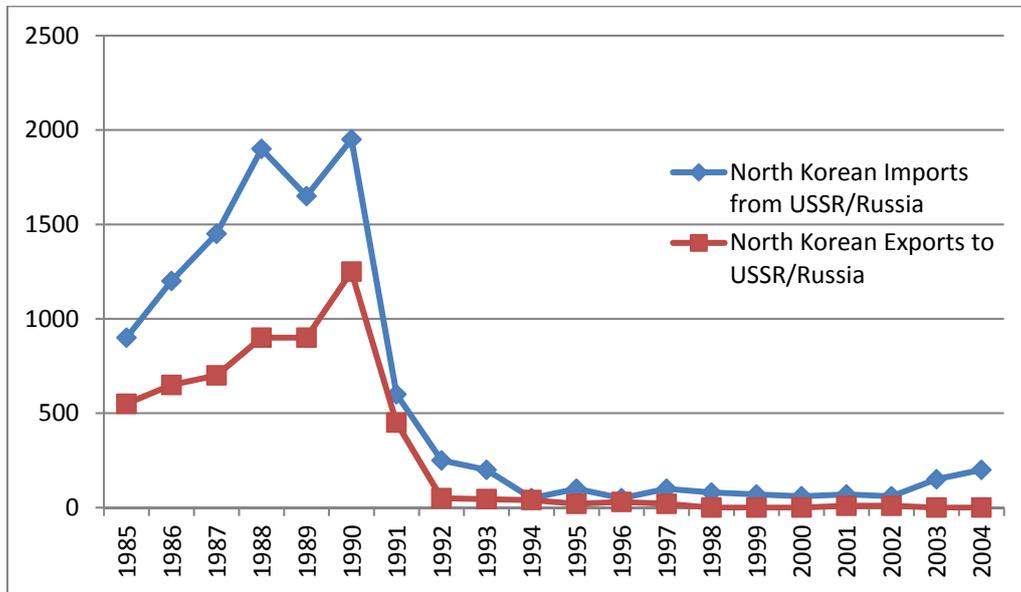
Food shortages that took place in 1970-1973 resulted in further centralization in the agricultural sphere. Food was produced according to a state-led plan, while local authorities had little influence on supply management. The whole process was standardized and unified, each household received instructions straight from the center and were forced to follow agricultural methods approved by the government.

2. North Korea's Finances

The famine that took lives of thousands of people is rooted in Korea's external environment in the late 1980s. Since its foundation Pyeongyang was reliant on the USSR

and, at later stages, China, who provided financial, technical and economic assistance and acted as North Korea's major international trade partners (Eberstadt, Rubin, Tretyakova 1995). From 1987 on the Soviet Union scaled down its economic support as North Korea proved to be unable to pay its previous debts and also due to its domestic challenges. Not only did the Soviet Union bargain with Pyongyang and demanded that it should pay world market prices, it also cancelled exchange programs that allowed transfers of military technology, which was a substantial blow to their foreign exchange balance. **Figure 2** shows a dramatic decline in USSR and later Russia's trade relations at the beginning of the 1990s, with Russian imports dropping almost three times and North Korean's exports declining almost to a zero. This shift in Soviet-Korean relations constituted a serious political impact as well as a deep economic impact – the breakup of the Soviet Union deprived North Korea of its valuable socialist partner (Oberdorfer 1997).

Figure 2. Trade with USSR/Russia, 1985-2004 (in million \$US)



Source: Eberstadt 2003 for 1985-2001; IMF 2006 for 2002-2004.

In response to deteriorating external environment, the regime began to import more food and launched a “two-meals-a-day” campaign in 1991; however, the beginning of the 1990s saw a decline in food imports, which is seen as a result of chuche policy and totalitarian nature of the regime (S. Lee 2005).

Increasing exports to pay for necessary imports was also a complicated process. Although North Korean allies used to buy their products notwithstanding their relatively low quality, when it entered the world market, “made in North Korea” sign faced a fierce competition and was not able to successfully meet many global requirements. Among other factors negatively influencing the export sector of North Korea were the crumbling

transport infrastructure and a diminishing number of stable power supplies. All that being said, over the course of the 20th century several countries, such as Taiwan and Vietnam, suffered similar trade shocks but managed to restructure their economies and attract foreign investments.

In order to mitigate the effects of declining export revenues, North Korea could take loans from the international capital markets. However, its history and reputation in financial circles was far from perfect. In the 1970s North Korea was granted several substantial foreign loans but was unable to neither purchase much needed machinery for its factories nor improve the infrastructure. Instead giant sums were spent on personal needs of those in power and on the capital's renovation. Not surprisingly, the regime ran out of money quite soon and declared it could not pay its obligations (Erik Cornell 2002). Moreover, there was also the issue of repaying the debt to the USSR and China that steadily grew through the 1970s and 1980s. Last but not least, North Korea's nuclear problem was an obstacle on its way to gain trust from major international financiers. All this led to a situation when Pyongyang was only capable of obtaining short-term trade credits and had to further drain its decreasing foreign reserves.

Seeking foreign aid, which is another way of getting the necessary help, also proved to be problematic. Souring relations with the Soviet Union, disenchantment with North Korea in the Eastern bloc, China's reluctance to provide assistance left it without its major partners. The West was traditionally quite skeptic about North Korea; besides, by the beginning of the 1990s it had not established diplomatic ties with them with the exception

of Scandinavian countries. Only in the late 1990s did the regime start to develop relations with them in order to get access to bilateral aid. Finally, North Korea's refusal to join international institutions and unwillingness of advanced industrial states to facilitate its entry were another constraint in receiving assistance on concessional terms.

As the options of conducting legitimate trade activities and borrowing from its partners were exhausted, the 1990s became known as the years of unauthorized commerce, contraband and counterfeiting. Such illicit activities including much disputed missile sales constituted about a third of Pyongyang's foreign exchange earnings (Chestnut 2005).

North Korea's limited capacity to import was another factor contributing to the famine. The table below shows its import of grain and demonstrates how volatile these transactions were. Imports from Canada and Thailand were unstable; as for the imports from other countries, most of them saw a decline from 1992 on.

Table 1. North Korea's Grain Imports, 1991-97 (in thousands of metric tons)

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
China	300	620	740	305	153	547	867
Japan	-	-	-	-	370	132	-
EU	-	-	-	-	-	-	115
Canada	350	80	160	-	-	-	-
Thailand	90	20	78	52	162	30	38
Syria	-	-	-	-	-	140	34
Other	550	110	115	133	277	201	576
Total	1290	830	1093	490	962	1050	1630

Source: Cho and Zang 1999.

Had Pyongyang accumulated adequate budget reserves notwithstanding the challenges in agriculture and industry, it would have been able to purchase grain from abroad to remedy the food shortages. As the regime's main goal was staying in power and maintaining its status-quo, its insistence on buying weapons in credit was another sign that it had run out of its foreign exchange. Therefore, the limited purchases in the international arena that North Korea made at the time of the famine were not enough to stop its course.

3. Internal Politics and Efforts to Prevent the Famine

Massive failures in the international assistance sphere and challenges in the trade sector prompted the North Korean government to reevaluate its approach and introduce some new policies to increase domestic supplies. In 1993 Pyongyang admitted the failure of the Third Seven-Year Plan (1987-1993), which was quite unusual for the government of this type, although the main reason for the failure was declared to be external. The central authorities allowed bigger private gardens that were still owned by the government and often occupied infertile land. Along with this they increased the opportunities for farmers to organize markets and trade in grains, at least temporarily.

Nevertheless, the regime was mostly preoccupied with technical issues instead of giving farmers incentives to produce more agricultural output. That is why initiatives to enlarge areas sown with grain, replacing shift crop system with corn and rice, increasing the use of fertilizers and machinery gave little results, and some of them were, in fact, harmful. For example, harvesting without any rotation reduced the fertility of the soil, while a

redundant use of chemical fertilizers created an excess of acid that negatively affected crops. Dwindling yields made cooperatives enlarge farming territories, which is believed to have led to the erosion of soil and the growth in the level of alluvium in rivers.

Here we need to examine the effects of natural calamities that hit North Korea in the 1990s and see how they contributed to the spreading famine. In July and August 1995 disastrous floods occurred, and the regime announced that the country lost almost 2 mln. tons of grain, about 300 thousand ha of farmland was ruined, and more than 5 mln. North Koreans were forced out of their homes. However, some experts claim that these figures were exaggerated: Michell (1998) notes that the crops of those years were insured, thus, some of the damage was covered. Besides, a UN survey stated that 500 thousand people were displaced, which is a substantially lower number compared to the government estimates. This gave the regime a convenient explanation of the famine, namely that it was brought about by a natural disaster that was beyond their control to prevent. It also played into their hands in a sense that they could now reveal enormous crop failures and appeal to the international community for assistance. After the floods of 1995 less damaging floods ensued in July 1996 and 2000-2001.

When trying to assess North Korean agricultural output, we need to take into account that official estimates provided by agencies such as FAO and USDA or North Korean official estimates differ from that of independent researchers and experts. Most of them show a growth in output in the 1980s and a drop in production in the first half of the 1990s, but the timing and depth of the decline are important to interpreting the famine. The

government data shows higher level of production at the outset of the famine than that of Lee, Nakano and Nabukuni (1995) and, consequently, a more dramatic drop to lower levels of output. It is possible that Pyongyang began to be concerned with food availability in the early 1990s as the food shortages would not have been that severe had there been a strong distribution system. Moreover, due to a complex international political crisis the government had little willingness to demonstrate its weakness or vulnerability to its rivals. Another wide-acknowledged factor is that preparing figures for a closed and secluded state like North Korea is a challenging task and as researchers are using some of the data provided by North Koreans, it can be skewed towards higher estimates of food availability.

All in all, there are two important factors to consider: by the early 1990s North Korean government had shown its inability to adjust to the fluid economic environment. The increasing external credit and balance of payments were a major constraint on establishing strong trade relations and finding reliable sources of imports. In addition, as we have seen, although the floods played a role in aggravating the food crisis, they were not the principal causes of food shortages.¹ It did do damage to infrastructure and energy facilities and reduced the size of cropland.² However, agriculture and other sectors of North Korean economy had been in decline since early 1990s, which is why we can claim that “the contribution of climatic factors to the agricultural crisis, as stressed by North Korea’s policy-makers, was at most a secondary cause” (Smith, Huang 2003:756).

¹ Woo-Cumings 2002, Smith 2005b)

² Williams, von Hippel, and Hayes 2000

V. Domestic Response

In this chapter we are going to apply Amartya Sen's entitlement approach to conduct a thorough analysis of the Public Distribution System (PDS) during the peak of the famine in 1994-98. As PDS was an important source of food for a vast majority of the citizens of the DPRK, it was also an instrument of political control over them. Up to this day it has been the main way to receive food as well as food aid. While the access to food in North Korea depends on a wide range of factors, we are going to look into the regional dimension of the problem as the groups that suffered most from starvation were workers in cities and towns and regions to the east of DPRK. (Smith 2005a, 2005b:83-87).

Naturally, variations in entitlements had an impact on mortality levels. To get a clear picture of the famine we will try to assess the general number of deaths from starvation and track to what extent have various groups been affected.

1. The System of Entitlements

According to FAO and WFP, all twelve provinces and special province-level municipalities (Pyongyang, Nampo and Kaesong) have a special organ responsible for the distribution of food – a Food Administration Department (FAO/WFP 1998b). Moreover, every county, city and urban district has a Food Administration Section and a warehouse which is used to provide food to lower-level public distribution centers (PDCs) and cater specifically designated institutions encompassing hospitals and kindergartens. The PDC,

covering one to two thousand families, is also a major source of cereals for the general public, not including those coming from cooperatives.

With intensifying food shortages, the North Korean political system proved to be rather decentralized, although it does not seem so on the outside. As the central authorities encouraged self-sufficiency at the levels of counties and provinces, local officials were left to deal not only with food supplies but also with its demand. County authorities connect the provincial authorities with the authorities of villages. People Committees of counties that consist of party bureaucrats and senior administrative officials are in charge of county-level warehouses. The committees have a meaningful role in gathering food since they establish targets, oversee the collection of grains from cooperative farms and send food to designated places. They were the ones who had to battle with the food crisis as it unfolded around the country.

At the time of the famine the PDS covered around 60 to 70 percent of North Koreans (FAO/WFP 1996). Rations were allocated according to age and occupation as shown in **table 2**. There are several important things to mention. First, it was almost impossible (and when possible, extremely expensive) for urban dwellers to get food outside of PDS before the marketization started. For instance, in the beginning of the 1990s a kilo of rice via PDS was worth 0.08 won, while at the market price it went for 25 won a kilo, which is 300 hundred times more (S. Lee 2003). As can be seen, regulating access to food has been an essential part of social and political supervision.

Table 2. PDS Shares and Population Figures by Occupation and Age

Occupation and Age Group	Per Capita Daily Ration (grams)	Population distribution		Ratio of Rice to Corn	
		(thousands)	(%)	Pyongyang area	Other areas
Top officials	700	4.8	0.02	10:00	10:00
Regular workers	600	4905.4*	37.14	06:04	03:07
Heavy-labor workers	800	4905.4*	18.95	06:04	03:07
Office workers	600	1976.3	7.48	06:04	03:07
Security forces	800	603.3*	2.28	07:03	07:03
Military	700	603.3*	2.28	06:04	03:07
College students	600	591.7	2.24	06:04	03:07
Secondary school pupils	500	2182.5	8.26	06:04	03:07
Primary school pupils	400	2397.5	8.26	06:04	03:07
Preschoolers	300	1270.6	4.81	06:04	03:07
Children under 3 years	100-200	1866	7.06	06:04	03:07
Seniors and disabled	300	104.9	0.4	06:04	03:07

Note: estimates with * indicate they were counted assuming the population distribution. Source: Haggard, Noland 2007

Second, food allocations plainly show the deepening stratification of the North Korean socialist system. The military, security forces and top officials took the highest place in the entitlement pyramid along with heavy-labor workers. In addition, the political elite got their rations via the central system – the party organs or special suppliers in the government (S. Lee 2003:255). In turn, the military had their own food sources – the Provisions Bureau in the People’s Armed Forces that provided rations and took care of emergency war reserves of food and fuel. The bottom of the pyramid was occupied by those with the lowest caloric intakes, which is children, aged and disabled.

Moreover, North Korean political prisoners excluded from this table, who comprised approximately 1 percent of the population, received food below sustenance levels – this signifies the authorities purposefully starved them, and that is also seen in the high mortality rates among them (Hawk 2003:25).

The above mentioned categories of distribution do not give the whole picture, though, because political status heavily influenced occupational strata. The Party classified citizens after investigating into their class and family history, identifying “core”, “wavering” and “hostile” classes. Based on this division, those coming from military, working or bureaucratic families were the core, those from middle peasant, merchant and small business owners’ families were the wavering, and the rest ranging from rich entrepreneurs, religious followers and intellectuals were labeled hostile (Hunter 1999; Oh 2003).

Belonging to one of these groups did not regulate food access; nevertheless, it had a strong influence on it. Coming from a certain class often determined the opportunities of an individual to get education, housing, promotion in the party ranks. Residence depended on class position as well. In the early days of the DPRK “hostile elements” were transferred to distant parts of the country, where the famine was felt most severely (Martin 2004:557-78). On the other hand, the core had higher chances of being granted residence in Pyongyang, which is a sort of a privilege as people living in the capital were living in much better conditions compared to the rest of the country.

Besides, the size and structure of the North Korean privileged need to be taken into account. As cited in the International Federation for Human Rights, in 1995 the core embraced 28 percent of the citizens, with the Korean Workers' Party constituting more than 15 percent of the population (Armstrong 2001).

We need to mention, however, that the vast definitions of the privileged categories incorporated members of various backgrounds: workers and peasants could hardly be referred to as elite; low-ranking officials in remote areas were hardly supported throughout food shortages. Even the military were in risk as can be presumed from Kim Jong-il's speech in 1996 and the military defectors reported food shortages among their ranks (Becker 1996). Living in the capital also did not ensure enough food – foreigners living in Pyongyang observed food shortages, however, they did not turn into outright famine (Harold 2004).

When assessing the size of the supported groups, around four million people were guarded from starvation by having an access to some sort of food source (Haggard, Noland 2007). Nevertheless, even among the elite signs of deprivation and even hunger were present, thus hitting at the heart of the regime's backing and presented difficulties for political control.

2. Food Distribution in Cooperatives

There are two categories that have been omitted from the PDS. People engaged in work on state farms producing goods other than grain got supplies for six months right after the

harvest, the other half of the year the PDS provided food to them. As North Korea is a socialist country, up to 90 percent of all the farmers were assigned to cooperative farms in the process of collectivization. Cooperatives receive production targets every spring, though they can be reassessed based on the harvest that year. They also received machinery and fertilizers from the government, and farmers could have their household plots for self-consumption. Cooperatives kept a share of cereals to distribute among farm households after the October harvest. That meant rations were not surrendered to the state but retained from production beforehand along with grains for seed and livestock.

Compared to other socialist countries, the fact that cooperatives did not sell all the grains to the state and had a direct access to it is worth being mentioned (S. Lee 2003). Although the government plays a central role in setting production targets and rations of farmers, it experienced major challenges every time it attempted to raise procurement from them, which was especially vital at the peak of the famine (Natsios 2001).

As we have seen, the social cereal procurement system is based on an exchange between the government and producers. Farmers get far less money for their harvest compared to what they could receive at market prices, but they are also granted rations of food, machinery, fertilizers and consumer goods. Still, as we have previously demonstrated, in the 1990s the government failed to supply cooperatives with the necessary inputs due to problems with trade relations with other countries and a recession of the country's industry. Because of this, farmers were left worse off after such trade as they gave more

than they received, and to them this arrangement began to resemble an unequal and unfair deal.

What is more, farmers were given bigger rations just like heavy-labor workers, so drastically reducing their rations made them more inclined to preharvest cereals, withhold it, redirect effort to their private household plots or send food to their families in urban areas. Experts cannot give exact estimates of food that was diverted this way but the evidence shows there is no doubt it had a negative impact on the grain availability.

Those reliant on PDS were another major source of concern for the authorities. If farmers could ensure they had enough food before it was surrendered to the government, people reliant on PDS did not have any leverage to get their rations, thus becoming an exceedingly vulnerable group. As a result, the authorities chose to claim lacking grains from the PDS instead of demanding it from farmers by recollecting the rations of this vulnerable group.

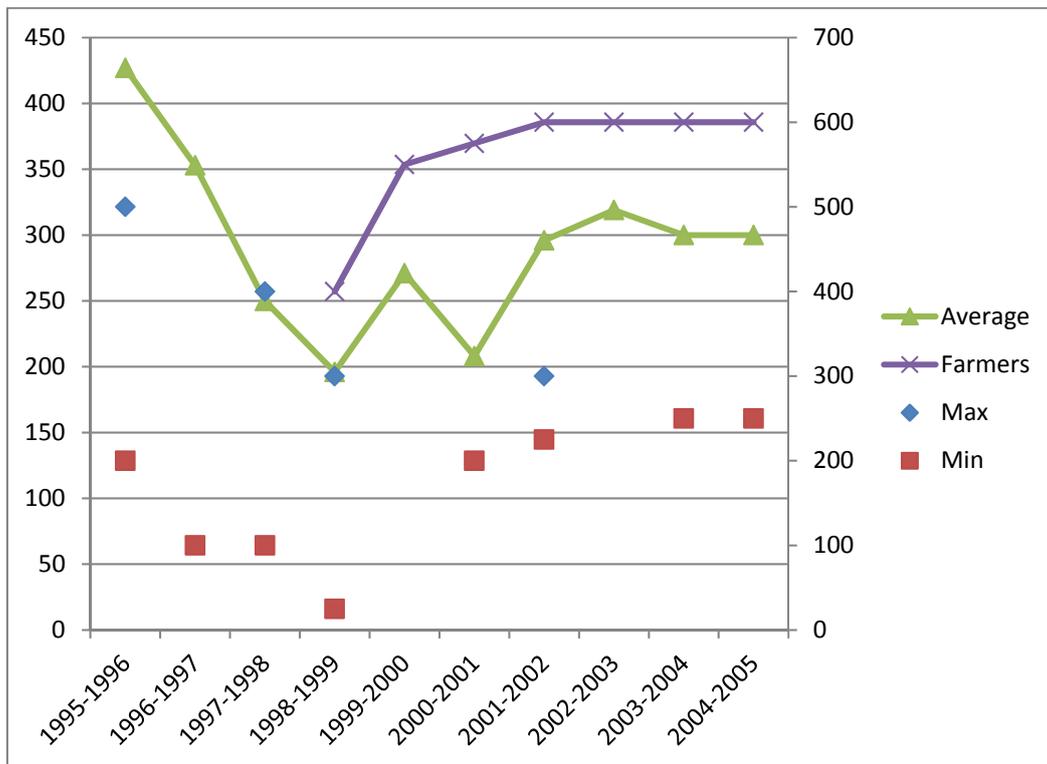
3. The PDS Breakdown

In this paper we mostly discuss the failures of the PDS at the onset and during the famine, however, some experts note that there existed serious problems well before that. With economic difficulties deepening, grain rations were constantly cut as early as in the late 1980s (Choi and Koo 2005). North Korean defectors also confirmed these findings in a series of systematic interviews with refugees carried out by the Korean Buddhist Sharing Movement in 1997-98 (KBSM 1998). About one third of the respondents claimed that

PDS had stopped functioning by 1993 and more than 90 percent said it had stopped functioning by 1996.

There is no available official North Korean data on PDS allocations until the launch of the international assistance programs in 1995. As can be seen from **figure 3**, WFP and UN Food and Agricultural Organization received the following figures from the DPRK officials, nevertheless, we need to keep in mind that they might also have been tempered with. The government of North Korea could deliberately downplay food rations in an attempt to obtain more food aid from donors.

Figure 3. Estimates of Daily per Capita PDS Rations



Source: Haggard, Noland 2007.

There are several points to mention. First, the average rations in North Korea did not reach the minimum human need that equals approximately 460 gram a day. Second, according to the data, PDS rations did not increase significantly after a rise in international food aid and a limited economic recovery since 1998. While occasionally the rations would go up to 300-350 grams, they were never enough to provide an adequate amount of calories. Third, as indicated in **figure 3**, farmers began to receive larger rations from 1999 on in a calculated policy choice of the government since meager rations farmers received in 1995 and 1996 ended in extremely low cereal procurement rates. Fourth, as the data we have shows PDS rations by year, it does not represent seasonal fluctuations.

For Korea, April, March, May and June are the months when the reserves from the last crop yield have almost finished, and the next harvest has not been collected yet. In DPRK the hungry season began in December, with rations dropping to the minimal size or ceasing altogether (Humanitarian Development Resource Center for DPRK).

4. The Spread of the Famine

Food shortages do not necessarily occur in all the groups of the population, thus, people may starve even when food availability is sufficient, as pointed out by Amartya Sen. Therefore, we need to examine the advancement of famine across various categories of North Koreans.

We will begin by scrutinizing the geographical spread of the famine. With the situation worsening in the northeast of North Korea, the central authorities had to battle with dropping domestic agricultural production as well as the deteriorating transportation system in order to relocate food from those provinces where there was some excess to those that desperately needed it.

We have previously seen that 1994 was the year of a further downturn of North Korean economics and external trade relations, besides, China reduced its maize exports to DPRK dramatically that year. Furthermore, the northeastern regions did not yield as many crops as was expected.

While we may assume that the regime deliberately understated the figures on food distribution and rations, we believe that tempering with the data on the relative provincial grain production would be of no use to them.

In 1998 official figures on the provincial grain production were presented to the UNDP by the government of North Korea. South and North Hamgyong and Yanggang provinces are colder than the rest of the country, which is why few crops are harvested there, with maize, the major source of nutrition, being produced in relatively little quantities compared to other regions.

According to North Korean estimates, per capita cereals yield in the northeastern part of North Korea shrank to 153 kg per capita, which means these provinces were unable to provide even the reduced ration to the people (S. Lee 2003:238).

There are two more points to mention: the discrepancy of PDS distribution between the urban and the rural population of the northeastern regions of the country. The following table demonstrates the statistics on the number of people living in each province and the share of those reliant on PDS.

Table 3. Government Data on Population by Province and Food (in thousands)

Province	Population		Food Category	
	Total	(% of Total)	Agricultural	PDS
Pyongyang	3 044	13	8	92
South Pyongan	3 100	14	27	73
North Pyongan	2 625	12	40	60
Chagang	1 323	5	28	72
South Hwanghae	2 290	10	49	51
North Hwanghae	1 734	8	40	60
Kangwon	1 467	7	31	69
South Hamgyong	2 932	13	31	69
North Hamgyong	2 227	10	22	78
Yanggang	703	3	21	79
Kaesong	386	2	35	65
Nampo	814	4	18	82
Total	22 554	100	29	71

Source: FAO/WFP 1999

While North Korea is urbanized to some extent, North and South Hamgyong and Yanggang provinces are one of the most urbanized regions. The cities there played an important role of DPRK's heavy industry base in various sectors ranging from steel, chemicals to fertilizers: Hanhung-Hungnam, Chongjin, Tanchon, Kimchaek, and Sinpo.

They went into decline with the disruption of both domestic and foreign inputs, and were heavily reliant on the PDS for food. Moreover, more sparsely populated Yanggang and parts of North Hamgyong provinces are predominantly mountainous regions, which renders it difficult for humanitarian personnel to access them, especially with the deteriorated transport infrastructure. As shown in the table, the majority of their residents were also dependent on PDS.

At that point the government took some steps trying to solve the food crisis. The central authorities downsized the rations of cereal allocated to farmers and tried to recollect some of the grain that it had left for them (Ahn 1996:251). It is no surprise that such policy drove farmers to do the things we have already discussed including preharvesting, relocating effort to private household plots and selling food at the black market.

In his book Natsios called this “triage”, meaning the regime’s arrangement to reduce grain delivery to the northeast (Natsios 2001). However, the evidence that backs this claim is insufficient and circumstantial because, although it is supported by survey evidence and defectors’ testimonials, many similar claims by refugees have been called into question. As for Natsios, he argues that such government decision could indeed be taken in the view of historical rivalry between the east and the west of the country. But does it mean Pyongyang was trying to guard food reserves that could alleviate the situation? Or was its aim the protection of certain favored regions? Or were the authorities fighting to get enough supplies at the onset of the collapse of the transportation system? As Ellman notes in his work, there can be two types of famine:

one when there is an adequate amount of available food and it is not allocated to avert starvation and one when food supplies are meager but can be redistributed (Ellman 2000). Therefore, it is important to understand that the ethical implications would be different in each case.

Although we do not know the motives of the government for sure, we can also see that food distribution in the east was limited from the geography of the external assistance that began in 1995. Then, the North Korean government directed relief and monitoring efforts to the western parts of the country, insisting that all aid should be transported via Nampo, a port in the west, notwithstanding the fact that the transportation network between the east and the west had collapsed. Only in 1997 did Pyongyang agree to deliver food through Chongjin, and still the eastern provinces received a mere third of all the shipments (WFP 1997). Natsios notes that as little as 18 percent of all WFP food assistance was sent there, with the eastern regions being almost completely reliant on PDS and with a third of North Korean population living there. Chinese food aid was also not concentrated in the east coast despite it facing particular challenges. In turn, Pyongyang did not recognize that the east of the country is experiencing any exceptional problems – it did not have enough information or purposefully overlooked it.

In July and August of 1995 the floods hit the country, signifying a change in the relationship with donors. When Pyongyang published the estimates of the damage incurred by the floods to the international organizations, they turned out to be outstandingly high: more than five million North Koreans displaced, which equaled a

quarter of the whole population, hundreds of thousands hectares of farmland devastated, two million tons of cereal destroyed.

Table 4 demonstrates that the DPRK's government reported a sharp drop in food production all over the country that year. Besides, the differences across the regions are quite striking, too. UN experts reported that the bigger part of the yield loss and displaced people originated from the northwestern parts of the country (S. Lee 2003:238). It has also been confirmed by the examination of satellite images showing especially serious disruption of agricultural facilities in the northwest (Okamoto, Yamakawa, and Kawashima 1997).

Table 4. Production of Grain in Provinces, 1989-97 (1989-92=100%)

	1989-1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Pyongyang, Nampo and Kaesong	100	116	69	48	36	37
South and North Pyongyan	100	113	91	33	24	29
South and North Hamgyong	100	61	73	44	28	18
South and North Hwanghae	100	111	70	42	25	38
Kangwon	100	86	89	50	22	19
Total	100	104	80	40	27	31

Source: S. Lee 2003.

The North Korean authorities tried to take some steps to find commercial providers of food and bilateral assistance, and on August 23 they called for international aid via UN. Unfortunately, the initial supplies were too moderate to feed half a million of flood-

affected North Koreans. The second time they appealed to the UN was no earlier than July 1, 1996 (WFP 1996).

Pyongyang was facing another predicament. The first option it had was to raise procurement levels from cooperatives with a possibility that farmers would then try to divert their grain and use it for their benefit. WFP officials concluded that in the spring of 1996 upon the decision of the North Korean central authorities farmers' rations were cut from 167 kg to 107 kg (Nathanail 1996:25). This policy choice inevitably led to preharvesting, hoarding and exchange on the black market.

There are two sources confirming this supposition. In December 1996 FAO/WFP conducted the evaluation of crop. The evaluation of the losses from the floods was only 300 000 tons, while as much as 2.3 mln. tons disappeared in practice. There can be different interpretations of this phenomenon. The WFP judged this cereal had been consumed due to starvation. Natsios, on the other hand, notes a significant difference between the population's consumption requirements and the estimated losses: he concludes this amount of maize would be enough to satisfy all the people in North Korea for four months (Natsios 1999:115). Pyongyang reported that 1.9 mln. tons of crops had been destroyed, which exceeds the UN estimates. The possible explanation here is the natural causes, and the other one is a tense relationship between the central authorities and the cooperative farmers, who, beginning to feel the consequences of the floods, chose to store some food for themselves.

Another source is Kim Jong Il's speech at Kim Il Sung University, where he named food shortage as the gravest issue the government has to deal with. Interestingly, he briefly mentions natural cataclysms to go on to accuse farmers and miners of hoarding grain whenever they can. Afterwards, he urged the party to conduct talks with farmers and raise their consciousness to procure more food from the army (Haggard, Noland).

The period from 1996 till 1998 was marked with further growth of misery. A new series of floods in 1996 hit North and South Hwanghae, Kangwon and Kaesong that are the granary of rice for North Korea. In 1997 a harsh drought was followed by a typhoon in summer, and a half of the maize harvest was lost, as a result.

Still, in 1997 and 1998 the international aid to North Korea increased. Consequently, the supply did not change, but more food was diverted outside of official channels and the PDS failed completely and totally. In 1997 North Korea the officials of the DPRK told the WFP that the rations shrank to 100-200 grams and calculated the time when each province will run out of food in an obvious attempt to attract the attention of international donors and urge for more food aid. Still, from this we can conclude that the distribution system had failed and North Koreans were left to fend for themselves.

5. Who was most seriously affected?

In 1998 the crop yield was rather solid, and doubled with the help from international donors, the famine had ended. The prevailing opinion in the academic environment is that this famine was a typical food availability crisis, and the regime took every effort to

distribute food to the best of its ability (S. Lee 2003, 2005; Woo-Cumings 2002). According to this view argues, the strong top-down socialist structure of the North Korean state could be helpful in controlling and relocating grains and other supplies. That would also mean that only a limited group of the privileged may have been protected, but the population was struggling with approximately the same level of food shortages.

In order to see whether this claim is true, we are going to examine some data on production and consumption by each province. Haggard and Noland present their estimates for 1997-98, which demonstrates that cooperatives produced different levels of grain across the country, but the rations of the farmers were in principle the same (Haggard, Noland 2007). As we have already mentioned the challenges that Pyongyang had to face with regard to the farmers' actions and behavior after the harvests in 1994-96, it looks quite rational that it strived to increase the farmers' rations and restrict the diversion of grain.

Another piece of evidence on the unequal distribution of food across different regions of North Korea is presented in table 5.

The figures were calculated using the official North Korean data reporting the amount of food allocated to those dependent on PDS and their number in every province from September 1997 till April 1999.

The differences are significant. Pyongyang is the biggest beneficiary of the PDS, sometimes getting twice as much as those in less favored provinces. Nampo, Kaesong,

Chagang and South Hwanghae follow suit, and the northeastern and northwestern part of the country are worse off. Once the harvest stabilized in 1998 and the peak of the famine had passed, the distribution questioningly becomes almost equal.

Table 5. Monthly PDS Rations, November 1997-April 1999 (kg per capita)

	Nov-Dec 1997	Jan 1998	Feb 1998	Mar 1998	Apr- Aug 1998	Sep- Oct 1998	Nov- Dec 1998	Jan-Feb 1999	Mar 1999	Apr 1999
Pyongyang	9.9	7.4	4.9	1.0	0.0	3.7	8.5	5.6	4.2	0.9
South Pyeongyang	6.6	4.9	3.3	0.7	0.0	2.5	8.6	0.6	4.3	0.9
North Pyeongyang	6.4	4.8	3.2	0.6	0.0	1.6	9.1	6.0	4.4	1.0
Chagang	10.5	7.9	5.2	1.0	0.0	2.6	8.7	5.7	4.3	0.9
South Hwanghae	8.8	6.6	4.4	0.9	0.0	3.3	8.2	5.5	4.1	0.9
North Hwanghae	8.8	5.3	3.6	0.7	0.0	2.3	8.0	5.3	3.9	0.8
Kangwon	5.6	4.1	2.8	0.5	0.0	1.4	7.9	5.3	4.0	0.9
South Hamgyong	6.7	5.0	3.4	0.6	0.0	1.3	8.5	5.7	4.3	0.9
North Hamgyong	7.5	5.8	3.9	0.7	0.0	1.5	8.5	5.6	4.2	0.9
Yanggang	9.5	7.0	4.7	0.9	0.0	1.9	8.3	5.6	4.2	0.9
Kaesong	8.2	6.0	4.0	0.8	0.0	1.8	7.2	4.8	3.6	0.8
Nampo	6.8	5.1	3.4	-0.6	0.0	1.7	8.2	5.5	4.0	0.9
Total	7.9	5.8	3.9	0.7	0.0	2.3	8.4	4.9	4.2	0.9

Source: Haggard, Noland 2007.

Refugee interview, although sometimes not randomly selected and overrepresenting certain areas of the country, coincide with these findings. The Korean Buddhist Sharing Movement carried out a series of systematic surveys intended to assess the mortality rates, birth rates and the behavior of households (KBSM 1998). One of the questions asked the refugees what regions suffered from famine the most. 62 percent answered it was South Hamgyong, 23 percent chose North Hamgyong and 22 percent named other areas, with less than 10 percent saying the distribution of suffering was uniform. We need to point out that although the majority of the respondents were from North Hamgyong, most of

them agreed the latter one was hit hardest of all. The possible differences between the South and the North are that northerners were able to cross the border more easily and get food from the black market. This justifies Natsios's theory about triage, especially due to the fact that the northeastern parts of North Korea saw first humanitarian food assistance only in late 1997.

Surveys and qualitative analysis of PDS imply that the most badly hit group were city dwellers in the disadvantaged provinces. They were unable to get any access to crop yield whatsoever, had neither any means of private supplies nor enough money to benefit from black-market exchange and trade, thus, they were fully dependent on the crumbling PDS (Smith 2005b). Furthermore, about 90 percent of survey respondents maintained that urban areas bore greater losses than the rural ones.

In addition, analyzing the mortality rates across various occupational groups in 1998 provides us with another piece of evidence of the complicated situation in cities and towns. We have argued before that bureaucrats, the military and professionals received more protection compared to other occupational categories. Hard-labor workers comprise a significant bulk of the North Korean population have relatively low mortality rates, too. An interesting point here is the number of people recorded as jobless. This group might include the elderly, but some defectors claim that plants and factories in cities were in decline, leaving thousands of people without a workplace. This explanation is very plausible as in spite of employment guarantees, certain groups of laborers had to be severely affected in the course of the crisis in the industrial sector.

Table 6. Mortality Rate by Occupational Groups

Occupational Group	Family Members	Mortality	Mortality Rate
Manual labor	2 398	441	18.4
Office worker	633	75	11.8
Professional	43	3	7
Farmer	296	71	24
Student	1 951	335	17.2
Soldier	217	13	6
Housekeeper	284	95	33.5
Other	122	27	22.1
Jobless	1 769	807	45.6
Unknown	1 536	785	51.1
Total	9 249	2 653	28.7

Source: WFP 1998.

The farmers, on the whole, did better than the urban population, however, even among them the place of residence played an important role. Those living in flood-stricken regions were heavily reliant on foreign assistance and the ability of the regime to relocate grain around provinces and villages. Besides, the reported mortality rates among farmers were 24 percent, slightly lower than the mean that equaled 28 percent.

All in all, with the spread of malnutrition and starvation, the importance of distribution mechanism and their obvious failure in the case of North Korea become quite visible. We have conducted our analysis by applying the entitlement approach by Amartya Sen, paying special attention to the issues of distribution and entitlements. We have also considered the geographical spread of the famine and how it affected the urban working class. We have proved that the promise of the socialist state to guarantee and secure food for everyone was not fulfilled and as a result of continuous shortages the food distribution

system collapsed. To continue, we are going to look into the international relief efforts, which became the main way for the North Korean regime to feed its people.

VI. External Response

1. An Outline of Humanitarian Aid to DPRK

Foreign aid was an important source of food supply to North Korea. It went via various channels such as multilateral and bilateral organizations, aid agencies and NGOs. The abundance of channels might somewhat complicate the task of assessing the assistance to DPRK, but it still underlines the crucial importance of the food aid for the improvement of the situation in North Korea.

In total, in the period from 1995 until 2005 North Korea received \$2.4 billion in the form of aid, which was predominantly represented by food assistance (67 percent) as well as aid aimed at food security and the development of agricultural facilities (table 7). Analyzing foreign aid through the lens of domestic production, many experts have noted the general vulnerability of North Korea's internal food supply and a high degree of dependency on international assistance. Staggering industrial sector and the government's reluctance to employ foreign exchange to attract potential trade deals led to a growing dependence on external aid (Haggard, Noland 2007).

However, donors demonstrated less and less willingness to keep sending aid to DPRK. Way before the nuclear crises broke out in 2002, the amount of food and other types of assistance dispatched to North Korea started to go down, which showed an overload of world-wide obligations for humanitarian organizations and the weariness from the lack of collaboration on the part of the receiver. World Food Programme has always been

concerned with the timeliness of aid, but in the case with North Korea it expressed urgent warnings to Pyongyang that the intended beneficiaries in North Korea could not receive its assistance. In 2005 DPRK claimed it did not need any foreign aid, making the stance of WFP even more insecure.

Coordination between donors and recipients is a vital part of any assistance program. In this chapter we are going to examine the role of multilateral organizations such as WFP that had a central role in alleviating the suffering of North Koreans. In total it has commanded \$1.3 billion worth of assistance to DPRK since 1995, which equals four million tons of grain, vegetable oil and other foodstuff (Smith 2005).

Table 7. Total Humanitarian Assistance, by Sector (millions of US\$)

	Food	Agriculture	Health	Water and Sanitation	Education	Coordination and Support Services	Other	Total
1996-97	36.16	4.73	4.02	0.00	0.00	0.06	5.38	50.35
1997-98	243.35	8.83	27.09	1.49	0.00	0.23	11.47	292.46
1998	312.14	7.09	6.35	3.55	0.62	0.30	5.04	335.09
1999	180.82	41.62	10.26	0.27	0.00	0.84	1.99	235.80
2000	150.21	59.03	7.37	0.23	n.a.	1.01	6.36	224.22
2001	270.75	55.52	20.19	0.31	0.18	1.33	29.28	377.59
2002	213.25	70.87	14.68	5.18	0.32	0.84	55.66	360.83
2003	124.02	5.31	24.44	0.95	0.93	0.23	30.79	186.70
2004	128.07	67.41	27.72	10.75	1.72	1.55	63.24	300.49
2005	29.79	2.33	4.21	1.21	n.a.	1.36	24.64	63.56
Total	1688.59	322.75	146.33	23.96	3.79	7.78	233.86	2427.10

Sources: UN-OCHA, n.d.a.; WFP 2006b.

It is important to note the unwillingness of many donors to provide any other kind of assistance to North Korea other than food assistance. A case in point is the history behind the Agricultural Recovery and Environmental Protection Plan (AREP) (Kim 2001). Upon the request of Pyongyang in 1998 UNDP organized a roundtable aimed at determining the origins of the famine and providing the donors with the background information on the state of agriculture in DPRK. The North Korean regime kept insisting that the cause of all evil is the floods and drought that first hit the country in 1995 coupled with the dropping volume of external trade, denying the internal political and systemic struggle. They obviously thought it a good way to secure funds for revitalizing their economy and infrastructure, requesting \$340 million for these purposes. Around \$130 had been granted by the beginning of 2000: one third was provided by OPEC and International Fund for Agricultural Development as grants and loans, another \$40 million was sent by the European Union, and the rest came through bilateral channels and NGOs.

Still, the assistance was mostly in the form of material and commodity support, with no contributions being made to modernize the technology or build up foreign reserves of North Korea so that it could revive its rural infrastructure. It is showcased by the fact that the share of both UNDP and FAO in the international assistance to North Korea amounts to mere 1 percent.

The bigger part of aid was channeled via multilateral institutions, but bilateral agreements are important to mention, too, as they accounted for about 26 percent of overall aid (excluding Chinese support), with the Republic of Korea and China leading. The NGOs

provided more than 10 percent of overall assistance, rising slightly in the 21 century. The devotion and commitment of NGO workers is exceptional and is highly praised by many. Nevertheless, public assistance prevails in the total assistance to North Korea.

2. Assessments and Aims of the Assistance Efforts

When the famine began, the international institutions in North Korea were in a difficult situation as they had no branches or offices there when the first signs of the crisis began to surface and experienced a shortage of information. The UNDP came to DPRK in 1980 and played an instrumental role in coordinating aid at the beginning (Smith 2002). For other organizations it was not that simple because the government did not welcome international inspectors in the country. The World Food Programme opened its unit in Pyongyang in 1995, though it was only allowed to work in the western provinces. NGOs also had to battle with the central authorities of North Korea who were unwilling to grant them permission to come at all (Flake and Snyder 2003; Reed 2004).

The main actors were divided in their evaluation of the origins and extent of the crisis, and that had a major effect on the multilateral effort. Regions bordering with China were said to be famine-stricken at a rather early stage, and some investigators jumped to hasty conclusions about the whole crisis (Lautze 1997; Snyder 1996).

Yet international residents of Pyongyang had less evidence of malnutrition and starvation before their eyes. For instance, one of the main European consultancies claimed in 1994 that they had been unable to see any starving people in North Korea (Euro-Asian

Business Consultancy 1994). Tours around institutions for the undernourished were sometimes taken with a hint of cynicism because inspections around the western regions did not present widespread malnutrition, so some concluded it was another trick of the regime to ask for more aid. Only after the World Food Programme insisted that the northeast should be opened for international organizations in 1997 did the information start to flow in and the severity of the issue became visible.

In other words, at the initial stage World Food Programme and Food and Agriculture Organizations did not conduct a comprehensive analysis and blamed the natural disasters the main cause of the famine, almost completely disregarding the malfunctioning of the North Korean agriculture (FAO/WFP 1995).

The government of the DPRK characterized the problem as a humanitarian matter focused on helping flood-affected citizens. FDRC, a committee of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was tasked with dealing with the above mentioned international organizations, with the primary goal being to expand the amount of assistance to North Korea and closely supervise their activities. In reality, it was more concerned with overseeing the personnel rather than facilitating the delivery of foodstuff to the targeted population (Snyder 2003a:6).

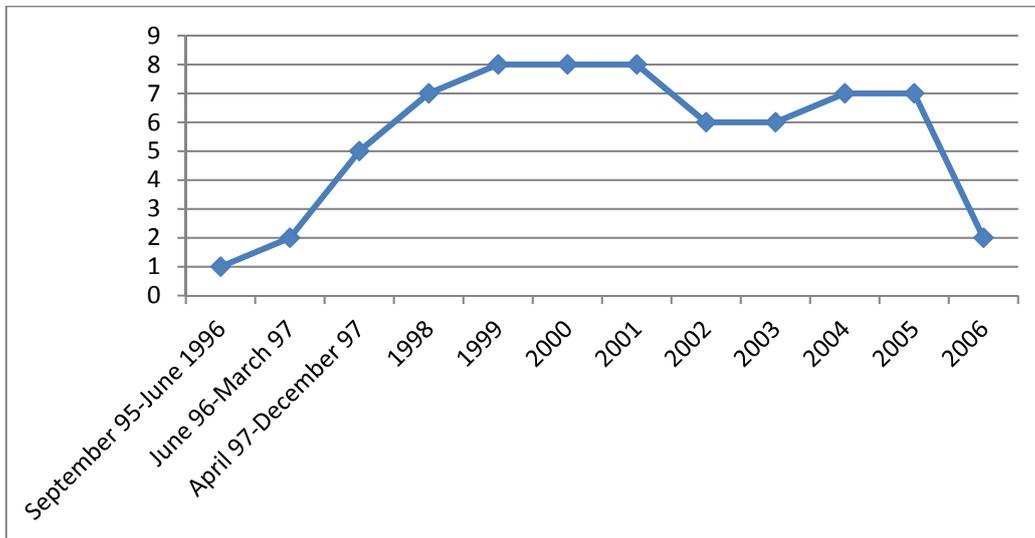
Although the DPRK was persistent in its interpretation of the continuous food shortages attributing it to the natural calamities, the observers soon realized that the extent of the crisis had exceeded their expectations. Theoretically, adequate and timely actions aimed at relieving the distress in a certain location might have succeeded in helping those in

need and distributing resources according to the situation. However, the donors were suspicious of the North Korean regime and doubted their financial transfers would find the targeted end users. It also went in line with the strategy of the US that mainly sent food produced in the USA under the pressure of the farm lobby. Furthermore, this approach suited Pyongyang as all the food assistance that North Korea received from outside went through the PDS.

In order to fulfill its objectives, the World Food Program had to identify the target categories of the population and make certain the international assistance effectively reached those in need. At first, the main target was proclaimed to be the flood-hit. With the time the list expanded from half a million people to more than 7 million recipients, specifying two main categories (refer to **figure 4**).

One was the vulnerable groups of the population such as children, pregnant women and the elderly, the other embraced the participants of food-for-work program, which dispatched food to building projects in the countryside and provided for one million North Koreans. In 1999 and 2000 the number of intended beneficiaries rose to 8 million, which is more than one third of the all the people in DPRK. The strategy of sending aid to limited categories of the population was justified by the circumstances in which multilateral organizations found themselves in North Korea.

Figure 4. WFP Targets by Appeal



Sources: FAO/WFP.

The WFP has carried out several surveys and, noting the precarious position of city dwellers that rely on PDS, realized what the most gravely hit categories are (FAO/WFP 2003, 2004). The groups remained the same but the organization tried to make a move to direct more aid to urban residents in the northeastern provinces.

Another point to mention is that international organizations did not command independent routes to access these categories, in fact, they were forbidden to do it. Still, some vulnerable groups kept in touch with the agencies: kindergartens, schools and hospitals. Working with them allowed the WFP to directly target some of the most severely affected North Koreans and ensure that the least favored got their rations (WFP 2003c).

While concentrating the efforts on several categories definitely helped some victims of the famine, certain issues remained. The notion of vulnerable groups was, in our opinion, not entirely useful. It is true that these categories suffered great losses in a country ridden with malnutrition and caring for children lifted some burden from their families. Yet the geographical spread of the famine was crucial: some households belonging to these categories were de facto protected, and striving to give food to all the children across North Korea inevitably directed it to the less needy. The bigger issue with targeting was that the North Korean food distribution channels were deeply flawed. There were no separate routes to direct food to hospitals, kindergartens and the elderly. The assistance provided by multilateral agencies went through counties' People's Committees and warehouses, and the World Food Programme could not supervise it. While county officials were not intending to starve the people around them, they were forced to handle various demands on food from the military and hard-labor workers; some could also be attracted by the idea of trading it at the black market. Consequently, in the end, irrespective of the targeted categories of WFP international food aid underwent the same bureaucratic procedures and was allocated through the very same distribution channels, thus backing the PDS.

3. Monitoring Aid Effectiveness

North Korea has frequently hindered the activities of the multilateral organizations on its territory. In times of need the regime accommodated some demands of the WFP, but when the situation and external environment improved, it restricted access to some parts

of the country and warned it would expel the personnel of international agencies. Therefore, the successes of aid regime have been uneven throughout the time.

Among the biggest concerns of the international community was that Pyongyang did not allow the missions of the agencies to travel to some regions of North Korea which were thought to be most severely affected. At early stages several provinces were completely written off the map for monitoring, and visits to those areas where access was granted were strictly watched. By 2000 the World Food Programme was allowed to monitor 167 out of 201 counties, but the progress much or less stopped there.

The government of the DPRK and the WFP had several disputes regarding the access to various parts of the country. For instance, the opening of the east coast was one of them. Every time the WFP requested the North Korean government to travel to Chagang province and the northeast they met rejection, so they could only monitor the west coast. Only after the WFP threatened it would not continue its work did the regime reluctantly acquiesced to permit the visit to the eastern regions (Natsios 1999:174). The conflict continued in 1998 when the head of the WFP warned Pyongyang they would discontinue the missions in 50 counties unless the organization was allowed to make monitoring visits across the country. This demand was voiced in the hungry months, which prompted the North Korean government to agree to let the WFP staff travel to another 11 counties, however, 39 counties were still out of reach.

Apart from the geographical part of the issue, North Korea was never satisfied with the number of foreign monitors it allowed. In 2001 the WFP had about fifty of its experts in

DPRK, and we need to remember that the amount of food sent there every year amounted to millions of dollars. Besides, Pyongyang insisted that the size of the staff of multilateral organizations should depend on the dollar price of assistance. Whenever the amount of aid went down, several people from these organizations were asked to leave (Haggard, Noland 2007).

Furthermore, Korean speakers were not permitted to work in the organizations' offices in North Korea, which posed another obstacle to humanitarian efforts. The FDRC appointed English-language translators of North Korea origin, which raised reasonable questions about their loyalty. Official relief agencies had to rely fully on interpreters approved by the regime in the absence of their own Korean-speaking staff, and that served an additional barrier to the communication between the monitors and the locals (Bennett 1999:16). In addition, as the North Korean personnel had primarily English language educational background, they did not possess the necessary skills to handle assistance, namely qualifications in health, logistics or nutrition. Even the South Korean nationals working in humanitarian agencies are restricted in their communication with North Koreans and are obliged to interact only with their counterparts.

North Korean laws banning unauthorized contact with foreigners exacerbated the situation with the North Korean staff: they were neither inclined to cooperate with the international community nor to disclose any information that could disgrace the authorities. FDCR officials also took part in monitoring visits to provinces and institutions, and in the authoritarian atmosphere of North Korea it could not but

negatively affect the establishment of closer relations with local bureaucrats and preclude form receiving sensitive information from them.

The North Korean government took steps to arrange surveillance over foreign staff to ensure there is no contact with the population outside of what has already been allowed. There are a number of accidents mentioned in memoirs and accounts of expatriates who had lived in North Korea describing personal checks and body searches of foreigners.

Apart from the geographic constraints, staff regulations and limiting the interaction with the locals, Pyongyang rendered it even more difficult for foreign observers to conduct satisfactory monitoring. Site visits are an integral part of the monitoring process, and in order for them to be effective the visits need to be random and sometimes without any prior warning instead of watching the orchestrated action that had been put up for the monitors. Agencies' officials should be able to have free access to the intended users of assistance, in particular hospitals, kindergartens and public distribution centers to have a sound understanding of the state of affairs. Possessing the information on food prices and market trends is also essential for monitoring. Last but not least, gathering evidence on diet and nutrition helps adjust aid flows to redirect them to the targeted population.

Some improvements have been made and the monthly number of visits of WFP official has increased since 2000 (WFP Monthly Updates). A standard visit would include a tour of food distribution centers and institutions catering the most vulnerable groups. The authorities need to be notified in advance, and certain locations can be denied access to. The WFP submitted requests to the government listing the places they intended to inspect,

and the government revised the application. If in 2002 about 8 percent of the total number of requests was rejected, but in two years time all requests were approved (Takahara 2004).

Since 1995 the monitoring regime has been up and down. There were several NGOs that decided to close their offices, but other agencies have witnessed some progress in the monitoring environment. The WFP visits became more frequent, focus groups began to provide new information to the staff about the rations and income. These improvements have helped the World Food Program to narrow down its attention from country-wide food security to a family-centered approach, facilitating the process of targeting the vulnerable (Smith 2005).

Nonetheless, while some progress has been made, it has had a major impact on the monitors' access to some parts of the country and proved that the North Korean government could stop cooperating with the international organizations on a whim. In a country where any foreign presence is regarded as unwelcome attempts at "randomness" during monitoring are doomed to fail. The location cannot still be selected by the WFP at random, and since they did not even have an account of all the North Korean institutions, the choice they had was rather limited.

4. Multifarious Aid Diversion

Claims about aid diversion and corruption in North Korea have haunted relief operations since their inception. Humanitarian aid is supposed to assist people in need, and ensuring that targeted groups rather than the undeserving receive it is the primary goal of

multilateral agencies. Another problem is that diversion is always accompanied by rampant corruption and those in power profit off the misery of the rest, accumulating huge funds. Finally, diversion has a tendency to undermine domestic political endorsement of relief operations in donor states.

Diverted food does not disappear into thin air – it ends up in somebody's hands. Therefore, when examining possible diversion one needs to analyze profits and losses of various social categories. The rigidly authoritarian nature of the North Korean reality gives incentives to divert assistance from the most vulnerable groups, and the shortcomings of the monitoring process reinforces this phenomenon.

First of all, diversion can be a centralized, state-level mechanism employed by the party and the military to benefit from the humanitarian assistance. These categories of the North Korean population are able to divert food due to their power, ability to use the transportation system to their advantage, and the problems of the monitoring regime.

However, several reservations about mass-scale diversion by the military should be made. To begin with, they preferred to get their rations, as Koreans, in the form of rice, and the WFP foodstuff such as biscuits, wheat and corn were not in their taste. Some international experts even claim that soldiers had access to the Chinese assistance to keep the multilateral shipments untouched (Haggard, Noland 2007).

Another interpretation of diversion is that it was performed by local bureaucrats and the military to redirect aid from targeted groups to others. As the supply chains in the military

were often deteriorating, they also found themselves in need of food and close to starvation, which gave them the incentive to divert food for personal consumption (Becker 1996). The testimonies of many refugees support this assumption. The army's capacity to provide for its soldiers was seriously compromised, so they were left to forage the countryside and forcibly take away food from people (Becker 1997a). What we see is not only the diversion to the military elite or the undeniable rule of the state machine, but also frequent food shortages among lower-ranking military cadres, who chose to turn to violence rather than starve. In other words, the diversion to the military did take place, though it was merely one of the routes to redirect assistance from intended beneficiaries.

Aid diversion to the black market as opposed to hoarding or consuming is another prominent channel. While, as we have argued, the military were unlikely to devour the "weird" foreign products when it could get the food they were accustomed to, the state, party and higher ranking military could divert aid to accumulate financial resources (Caritas –Hong King 2005a:11).

Naturally, it is rather problematic to gain concrete evidence on diversion as it represents wrongful conduct in the eyes of the international community.

In the previous chapter we have mentioned that the North Korean authorities often had multiple incentives for diversion since it views food distribution in a different way than foreign donors. Having compared the cost for rice and corn before and after price reforms, Lee has noted that before and at the onset of the famine the difference was enormous, increasing with exacerbating food shortages: in 1996 a farmer could receive 100 times

more money by trading food at the market rather than by surrendering it to the authorities. It gave them a strong incentive to siphon food via unauthorized routes instead of state-controlled channels (S. Lee, 2003).

Table 8. Price Differences for Rice and Corn, 1990-2003

	Official Procurement Price	PDS Price	Market Price
Rice			
1990	0.8	0.8	20
1992	0.8	0.8	25
1996	0.8	0.8	100
1997	0.8	0.8	102.5
1998	0.8	0.8	77
1999	0.8	0.8	64
2000	0.8	0.8	46.6
2001	0.8	0.8	49.5
2002	17.1	18.4	52.5
2003	40	44	156.6
Corn			
1998	0.5	0.06	80.8
1999	0.5	0.06	66.5
2000	0.5	0.06	55.5
2001	0.5	0.6	64.9
2002	8.6	10	4.1
2003	20	24	5.8

Sources: S. Lee 2003; Lim 2005.

Farmers were incentivized to divert supply, but state bureaucrats were even more tempted to do so. In **table 8** we see that the difference between PDS and market prices was bigger

than that between procurement and market prices. Trading foreign aid in the black market was a sure way to self-enrichment, especially in North Korea where a stable tomorrow was not guaranteed to anyone. Despite the harshness of punishment for aid diversion, the obvious inability of the state to produce and provide food compelled many to take their chances. Besides, it is uncertain whether the punishment was harsh for the political elite: they were not accountable to the most vulnerable groups and that could leave them with impunity (Haggard, Noland 2007). The monitoring system could probably regulate or at least detect such behavior at the markets but international agencies were precluded from visiting them, so they could not collect any evidence on the illegal activities of this kind. Still, humanitarian aid workers themselves have confirmed it in their interviews. After all, some agencies left exactly because they did not believe aid reached its intended beneficiaries (Terry 2001).

All in all, donors strive to fulfill their humanitarian and political aims, while a receiving country tries to maximize assistance on less strict conditions. The character of the DPRK such as rigid control over the population and neglecting their sufferings allows it to keep foreign donors at a distance, pressuring them to accept to a great extent the North Korean terms and conditions and imposing constraints that hinder effective humanitarian effort.

VII. Conclusion

The North Korean famine of the 1990s took hundreds of thousands of lives, becoming a terrible humanitarian catastrophe. It was brought about by the policy of self-reliance which contributed to the DPRK's susceptibility to political as well as economic fluctuations in the global environment. The central authorities proved to be inefficient in dealing with the imminent crises when they failed to devise a policy line that would ensure the growth of industry and agriculture. They also put obstacles to efficient targeting and monitoring of relief operations such as restricting access to certain regions of the country and staging orchestrated visits to specifically designated institutions for the malnourished in an attempt to gain more aid and at the same time keep control over the North Korean people.

As we have examined the issues and challenges of humanitarian assistance in times of crises, we need to understand the duties and obligations that other countries have to North Koreans. Being a party to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights that embrace the right to food, Pyongyang should bear responsibility before its people. With some organizations agreeing on the progressive realization of this right and others having a strong stance on it, they all urge the state to do their best and take adequate measures to provide citizens with enough food. Nevertheless, it is understood that sometimes states are not able to fulfill

these obligations by themselves, which is why the international community has an obligation to assist them in dire times (ICESCR).

Our analysis has demonstrated that the humanitarian effort in North Korea was an important source of food for many, with food shipments amounting to \$1.5. Yet it faced many challenges as humanitarian organizations had to accommodate numerous demands of the state. Inability to reach some locations renders it difficult to assess the effectiveness of targeting. Diversion has been a way to amass funds for some categories of the North Korean population and prevented food from reaching the most vulnerable groups such as the elderly, pregnant or nursing women and children. The military has also participated in the process of diversion, with lower-level personnel taking the food away from the needy because their own rations were not adequate and high-ranking staff diverting food for the purposes of self-enrichment.

An important question that follows from our analysis is whether the international community should keep sending assistance to the DPRK despite the above mentioned phenomena. Some experts claim that by doing so the world inadvertently nurtures the authoritarian regime, insisting that if Pyongyang stops receiving aid from abroad and gets isolated from the international trade, the policies or even the regime itself might change (C. Kang 2005).

We believe that a regime change in North Korea should be a peaceful process. Pyongyang has on numerous occasions demonstrated its willingness to subject its people to hardships when it deems fit. Consequently, cutting down on humanitarian assistance does not

guarantee any improvement in the North Korean policies – on the other hand, is likely to hurt the people more than the regime. Furthermore, despite the problems the humanitarian community faces in the DPRK, we cannot underestimate its importance and role in mitigating the famine. Assistance has raised the overall supply and positively affected the prices in the market. Even the issue of diversion has its bright side: while some food has certainly been used for purposes other than feeding the vulnerable, in most cases over 50 percent of shipments managed to reach the targeted groups and alleviate their sufferings.

Proposals to reduce food aid to North Korea are founded on vary shake premises of utilitarianism, implying that forsaking the innocent today for the benefit of the future generation is tolerable. However, such logic contradicts the values and norms that the modern world is striving to observe. The author thinks that donors should continue helping those who were denied their right to food. We believe it would be more practical and future-oriented if multilateral humanitarian organizations and NGOs deployed in North Korea kept pointing out the flaws of the public distribution system as well as the actions of the authorities that do not allow them to carry out their work effectively, following humanitarian principles and norms to capacitate beneficiaries, pushed for the improvement of monitoring and assessment regime which could be useful to the authorities as well as to the donors with an aim of watching after the health of the population.

While we believe that the failure to stand by the main principles of the humanitarian aid is a faulty road to constructing a pattern of handling intricate crises of such nature, we

think that gradually diminishing the size of the humanitarian aid to the DPRK will lead to positive changes. We need to ensure that North Korea is on its way to self-sufficiency (not merely paying lip service) meaning that it is able to use its foreign reserves to purchase and import food when it fails to produce enough food domestically to feed its people. Unfortunately, Pyongyang appears to be reluctant to do so at the moment, and the international community needs to make it clear that it cannot finance the DPRK's food deficit eternally, which means they would have to take care of the needs of their citizens in the near future all by themselves.

To incentivize a move away from heavy reliance on humanitarian aid a broader access to development assistance should be secured. Admitting the DPRK to international organizations, namely the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund would be a promise of getting loans and technical assistance. If North Korea wants to be a part of this process, it will have to accommodate the demands of external monitoring, accountability and transparency every time it avails itself of the funds belonging to these financial institutions.

Although we have outlined the problems and challenges of humanitarian assistance to North Korea and given the possible solution for its gradual inclusion in the international community, we recognize the necessity of further studies in order to develop a comprehensive strategy towards North Korea, provide it with tools to revive the economy and society and ensure that a tragedy of this scale will not take place ever again.

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Abstract in Korean

국문 초록

위급시 인도주의적 지원 도전:북한 기근 사례를 중심으로

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1990년대 초반부터 1998년까지 기근으로 인해 사망한 북한 주민의 수는 수십만명에 이른다. 당시 정권은 이러한 기근의 원인을 1995년 북한을 강타한 홍수와 가뭄이라는 자연 재해에서 찾았으며, 이와 같은 자연 재해로 인해 이전부터 문제가 되어왔던 농업분야가 파괴되었다고 비난했다. 또한 이에 따른 대북 인도적 지원 활동은 취약계층의 인구가 계속적으로 사망함에 따라 거의 성공하지 못했다고 볼 수 있다. 따라서 본 논문에서는 아마르티아 센(Amartya Sen)의 획득권한(entitlement)에 관한 접근법을 바탕으로 북한의 내부 및 외부에서 실패 원인을 분석하고자한다.

북한 사회주의의 성격은 배급제를 통해서 설명되며, 또한 이러한 배급제는

여러 계층의 북한 주민들의 주요 식량 공급 방법이라고 할 수 있다. 이는 국가에 대한 강력한 통제를 가능하게 했다. 그리고 우리가 주장하는 바와 같이, 북한의 많은 주민들이 배급 이외에는 식량을 구할 수 있는 다른 방법이 없었기 때문에 배급제의 붕괴는 광범위한 기아문제의 주요 원인이 되었다고 볼 수 있다. 더 나아가, 외환 보유고를 사용하여 해외에서 식량의 반입을 허용하지 않은 것 뿐만 아니라 경제위기 상황이 올 것을 감지하였음에도 불구하고 제 때에 적절히 대응하지 못했다는 점에서 해당 정부 정책이 실패했음을 이해할 수 있다.

배급제라는 사회 제도는 계층에 따라 배급에 차등을 두었는데, 이러한 차등 배급으로 인해 기근이 계속되던 당시에 식량을 배급받을 수 없었던 주민들은 굶주림과 죽음에 직면할 수 밖에 없었다. 여러 계층 중 도시 노동자 계층이 가장 큰 타격을 받았는데, 이는 이들이 보유한 사유지가 없고, 배급제를 벗어나서는 따로 식량을 조달할 수 없었기 때문이라고 볼 수 있다. 또한, 북한의 북동부에 위치한 지역들은 인도적 지원 활동이 중단된 뒤 심각한 식량난을 겪었다는 점에서 지리적인 요소도 무시할 수 없음을 알 수 있다.

북한에 대한 인도주의적 지원은 1995년 세계 식량 계획(WFP)을 비롯하여 시민단체 등이 구호 활동에 적극 참여하면서 시작되었다. 그러나 인도주의자들은 북한 측의 비협조적인 태도로 인해 지원 활동 대상 설정, 모니터링 및 작업의 효율성 평가에 있어 끊임없이 문제에 직면하고 있다. 모니터링의 경우 북한

정부는 처음에는 특정지역에만 제한시켰으며, 이후 점진적으로 외국인의 방문을 외곽지역까지 허용하게 되었다. 영양실조에 관한 전문 기관의 조사는 자주 있었지만, 국가 내부에서의 진행상황에 대한 명확한 정보는 제공되지 않았다고 볼 수 있다.

주제어: 기근, 북한, 인도적 지원, 배급제, 획득권한

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