

THE AMERICAN NGO EXPERIENCE IN NORTH KOREA –

A Preliminary Assessment

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Introduction: Since the fall of 1995, North Korea's approximately 22 million people have been the focus of a sustained global humanitarian effort to minimize the tragic human consequences of persistent food shortages and a pervasive public health crisis in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). More than thirty governments, over 130 non-governmental (NGO), private voluntary (PVO) humanitarian relief organizations, and virtually every major international relief organization has contributed to this effort. Their combined contributions of food aid between September 1, 1995 and October 31, 2001 amounts to nearly 6,000,000 metric tons of food worth close to US \$1,000,000. Additional assistance in the areas of public health, agricultural recovery and development, sanitation and education increased gradually from approximately US \$8,000,000 in the winter of 1995–96 to \$10,000,000 in 1998, and then jumped to US \$60,000,000 in 2001, largely because of assistance from the Republic of Korea (ROK) government and NGOs (See Chart II on page 10).

Torrential rains in August 1995 wrecked havoc in North Korea's four western provinces: North and South Pyongan, and North and South Hwanghae provinces. Flooding washed away fields, crops, homes, dykes and roads. Electric power and telephone lines were knocked down, bridges and railroad beds washed away. These four provinces account for an estimated 70 percent of the nation's annual rice harvest and 53 percent of its maize production.^(1) According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) December 1995 appeal for aid, 100,000 families lost their homes and 400,000 hectares of arable land (25 percent of the nation's total) was destroyed or flooded. Of the approximately 480,000 homeless persons, an estimated 77 percent lived in the three northwestern provinces of North Pyongan, Chagang and North Hwanghae.⁽²⁾ Damage in the nation's capital and the northeastern and

eastern provinces was marginal in August 1995. These areas, however, sustained significant rain related damage one year later, August 1996

United Nations (UN) relief organizations, responding to the DPRK government's appeals for emergency aid through the UN Development Program (UNDP) Office in Pyongyang late in August 1995, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) initiated the endeavor in the wake of extensive floods that caused widespread devastation in August 1995, particularly to North Koreans western provinces.⁽³⁾ At the time of the floods, the sole resident representative of the United Nations was Faruq Akizad, the representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). He had toured the flooded areas in early September using a North Korean government helicopter. His video tape of the devastation was stunning (.⁴) UN relief agencies, led by the World Food Program (WFP), Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, Rome) and UNICEF, responded immediately with medicine, clothing, kitchen kits and bedding. By October, the first resident representative of the WFP, the British citizen and career UN civil servant Trevor Page, opened an office in Pyongyang's diplomatic compound. A trickle of food aid began arriving in November. The IFRC had also responded immediately. They too had opened an office in Pyongyang staffed by another British citizen. UNICEF representatives from Hong Kong took up residence in the Koryo Hotel, Pyongyang's premiere hotel for foreign visitors.

Additional aid from governments and NGOs followed promptly. European, American and Japanese humanitarian organizations rushed to assist the UN World Food Program (WFP), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the IFRC with contributions of cash, food, clothing, bedding, kitchen equipment and medicine. The governments of Japan, China, South Korea, and Syria were among the first to send large amounts of food aid in the form of rice, maize and wheat. Beginning in the summer of 1996, the United States government assumed the lead as the largest donor of food aid to North Korea, a position it maintained until 1999. Japan leaped to the forefront in 2000 with a contribution of 320,000 metric tons of rice. In 2001, the Republic of Korea (ROK) took the lead in terms of total assistance to North Korea. The ROK government, working both through international organizations and a maturing network of Korean NGOs, sent North Korea more than 200,000 metric tons of food aid, 200,000 metric tons of fertilizer and nearly \$30,000,000 worth of agricultural equipment and seeds, clothing, medicine and medical equipment, vehicles and related materials. (See Chart II. page 10)

This is a preliminary study of the American NGO contribution to this effort.

In the Beginning

A trickle of representatives from international humanitarian organizations began arriving in North Korea only a few days after the torrential rains of August 1995 had devastated the 1995 corn and rice crops. A delegation of United Nations' representatives reached Pyongyang on September 2, 1995 to evaluate the situation. There was an immediate, global and substantial response to this UN team's September 12 report and appeal to the international community for humanitarian assistance for the people of North Korea. The Swiss based, international humanitarian organization ADRA and their Catholic counterpart CARITAS promptly dispatched teams to North Korea. Included in the ADRA group was Ken Flemmer, ADRA's Asia Regional Director and a U.S. citizen.(5)

Actually, representatives of the Asian-American community in the United States had been monitoring North Korea's increasing shortage of food since its inception in the early 1990's. The rains and subsequent floods, however, pushed the shortage to crisis proportions. Victor Hsu played a leading role in these early trips. As the representative of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCUSA), he established a framework for ecumenical contacts with North Korea's Korean Christians Federation (KCF). While the organization's primary goal was to promote reconciliation between the governments in Washington, D.C. and Pyongyang, their access to North Korea afforded them insight into the deterioration of the nation's food supply. Other American organizations paralleled the NCCUSA's efforts. Actually, the Quaker church's American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) pioneered the American non-governmental (NGO) presence in North Korea beginning in the early 1980's. A prominent figure in the AFSC's effort was Ms. Yu Chong-ae. AFSC teamed up with NCCUSA, ADRA USA and numerous Korean-American churches to bring to the attention of the American public the plight of the North Korean people.

A second wave of American NGOs began arriving in the bitterly cold month of February, 1996. They represented Mercy Corps, a non-governmental organization, or NGO, based in Portland, Oregon, and the Latter Day Saints Charities, the Mormon Church supported NGO, or private voluntary organization (PVO) (.⁶) These well intended good Samaritans were late, but eager to help. Representatives of these relief agencies met

over dinner in early October 1995 to coordinate their efforts. The WFP would focus on the western and southwestern provinces of North Korea, centering its effort on Nampo, North Korea's main port on the west coast and the arrival point for the first shipments of food aid.(7) The Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies complemented would concentrate on distributing food aid and medicine in the southeast province of Kangwon and the main east coast port of Wonsan. UNICEF would work to distribute kitchen kits, bedding and clothing to the flood victims in the northwest provinces, particularly the devastated area east of the Korea–China border city of Sinuiju. The sole US government representative, State Department Officer Kenneth Quinones, would tour as many provinces as possible and meet each Wednesday evening at the Koryo Hotel's first flood Korean restaurant. (At the time, he spent every other month of 1995 living in North Korea with a small group of American nuclear technicians at North Korea's Nyongbyon Nuclear Research Center.)

In Washington, D.C., the US government's response from the beginning was impeded by quarreling among the various agencies concerned with policy toward North Korea. Key persons in the United States government, particularly the Department of Defense (DoD) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), greeted the reports of devastation with scepticism. Some at the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) dismissed Mr. Akizad's video tape as dating from the Korean War At the end of September, the Department of State's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance sent UNICEF a check for \$225,000, \$200,000 to be used as needed and \$25,000 designated for use in North Korea. (8)

Early Encounters – 1980–95

Some leaders of the Asian–American, particularly the Korean–American community in the United States began visiting North Korea in the 1980s. The motivations varied from personal to political. Many of these early trips aimed to find and help long lost relatives. The visitors to North Korea journeyed there either as individuals or as representatives of small Korean–American churches and community organizations. Most came from the relatively large Korean–American communities in Los Angeles, New York, Washington, D.C. and Honolulu. They included Revered Edward Kang of Virginia, then of Vienna, Virginia, who arrived in Pyongyang in the late 1980s only to learn at the airport that his mother had died the week before. The Korean–American businessman and church activist from Seattle, Washington Peter Lee made occasional visits to Pyongyang, each time taking small amounts of medicine, money and clothing as gifts for his

kinsmen. Other's represented organizations like the NCCCUSA in which Victor Hsu, originally a native of Taiwan, was a prominent figure who led several groups to Pyongyang in the pursuit of US-DPRK reconciliation. Ms. Yu Chong-ae was a dynamic promoter of AFSC programs aimed at promoting public understanding and reconciliation. Dr. Pilju Kim Joo, and American educated agronomist resident in Minnesota and her husband Don, a specialist in animal husbandry, began working with counterparts at North Korea's Academy of Agricultural Sciences in the late 1980s to improve grain crops and animal husbandry techniques.

A few represented academic institutions: the University of Hawaii's Dr. Suh Dae-sook, University of California at Berkeley Dr. Tony Namkung, University of Pennsylvania Dr. Lee Chong-sik, and George Washington University Dr. Kim Yong-chin. Their purpose was to facilitate educational exchange by arranging brief study tours from Americans to visit North Korea and vice versa. Dr. Yong Chin Kim led a number of visits and brought small groups of North Korea's to the United States. Dr. Suh Dae Sook pioneered visits to Kim Il Sung University in Pyongyang, aided by his wife's kinship ties to Kim Il Sung's son-in-law and speaker of the Supreme People's Assembly Yang Hyon-sop. Dr. Tony Namkung, whose father was a prominent anti-Japanese Korean nationalist and socialist, arranged similar study tours for the Asia Society.

One of the more distinguished and accomplished pioneers was Dr. Hyun Bong-hak, a Korean-American resident of New Jersey. He had learned English at a small Korean founded middle school in Yanji, China. After Korea's liberation from Japan in 1945, his family returned to their home in Pyongyang. Hyun's father sent him to Seoul for study. When the Korean War broke out, Hyun fled south where he was drafted into the South Korean army. Because of his fluency in English, he was assigned to a US Marine Corps unit and served with it until war's end. American missionaries then financed his study of medicine in Richmond, Virginia. At Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore, he became an accomplished medical doctor. Dr. Hyun in the 1980s quietly began to visit Pyongyang. He began teaching medicine at the Pyongyang Medical College, located two blocks from the Koryo Hotel. Eventually, he was able to begin delivering modern medical equipment to the hospital with financial support from various Korean-American organizations.⁽⁹⁾

In every case, however, US and DPRK government regulations impeded and complicated these pioneering efforts to open private channels of communication between the United States and North Korea.

The U.S. government's economic sanctions on North Korea restricted each US citizen visitor to delivering no more than \$400.00 worth of gifts to relatives in North Korea. Licenses to export larger quantities of 'basic human needs' were authorized in 1988, but obtaining a license was time consuming and expensive. Meanwhile, the North Korean government made obtaining entry visas a difficult and costly process.

A greater impediment was the fact that the Cold War had yet to end on the Korean Peninsula. After 1984, US citizen travel to North Korea was unrestricted. Citizens of South Korea, however, could not in any way contact someone from a communist nation, including a relative, without risking breaking the notorious National Security Law strictly enforced by Seoul's still authoritarian government. The South Korean government considered Korean-Americans to be subject to Seoul's National Security Law which required permission prior to each contact with someone in a communist country, particularly North Korea. South Korean intelligence officers stationed in the United States expected Korean-American citizens of the U.S. to provide post-North Korea visit debriefings. These officials suggested they were in close communication with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), an accurate claim.

Then too the North Korean government had its all pervasive political agenda. It sought to screen foreign visitors according to stern political criteria. In short, only the most highly motivated American citizens would even consider visiting North Korea. For the fortunate few who received visas to visit North Korea, every aspect of their visit – the timing, duration, people and places visited – were all controlled. Fearful of potential political repercussions to relatives and friends in either North or South Korea, and concerned about FBI challenges to their loyalty to the United States and/or compliance with the Trading With the Enemy and related Congressional Acts, this earliest phase of the Korean-American NGO effort in North Korea remains invisible to most Americans. Consequently, the flow of visitors and humanitarian assistance remained a trickle, even in 1996. Nevertheless, these pioneers provided invaluable insight into North Korea, which remained even in 1996 a foreboding and strange land. (10)

Preconceptions

The American NGOs who arrived in North Korea in the first half of 1996 had ample reason to believe they could help the North Korean people.

Many on their boards of directors shared the conviction that Christianity and democracy gave them moral and political superiority. They and their parents had served on the frontiers of Christianity and democracy in China during the 1930s and 1940s. When their benevolent effort to transform China ended in frustration with the rise of Mao Tse-deng's communist China, they shifted their focus to South Korea. America's Christian NGOs cared for South Korea's hungry, its orphans and ultimately, through education and medicine, nurtured belief in Christianity and respect for democracy. While maintaining their independence from all governments, their own and that of South Korea, America's Christian NGOs coordinated their efforts with those of the US Agency for International Development, the United States Information Agency, the Fulbright Program and the Asia Foundation. None can deny that the team work between American missionaries and their government was of tremendous mutual benefit. Simultaneously, it ensured maximum benefit to a broad sector of South Korean society.

No sooner had the American Christian NGO endeavors in South Korea given rise to an increasingly prosperous and plmbodians were fleeing their homelands to bordering nations and the open sea. American NGOs were at the vanguard of this international effort, caring for the hungry and homeless in Southeast Asia while pressing their government at home to implement policies that would nurture economic recovery and a durable peace in Southeast Asia.

Looking back, their efforts had a profound and enduring impact on US policy toward the region, and toward the care and feeding of refugees around the world. In South Korea, both the South Korean and US governments had welcomed America's Christian NGOs as a valuable supplement to their efforts to rebuild South Korea after the Korean War. In Southeast Asia, the American NGOs did not have to contend with the hostile regimes in Cambodia and Vietnam, nor did they have to reside in either nation to pursue their work. Instead, the American NGOs could rely on their government to support the work of the UN High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) to press the Thai government to accommodate American and other NGOs within its borders so they could care for the hundreds of thousands of refugees in camps along the Thai-Cambodia border.

In North Korea, American NGOs would soon learn they faced entirely new challenges. Their work there would place them in an intense political vortex. The North Korean government and North Korea people

would view them through the prism of a half century of hatred and distrust for Americans. For many officials in Pyongyang, the American NGOs were there to spy their nation's weaknesses, pollute their native culture, and undermine political stability by propagating the selfish values of democracy and capitalism. To many in the South Korean government at the time, the self proclaimed work of America's humanitarian idealists perpetuated the despotic government of Kim Jong Il and undermined South Korea's ability to achieve national reunification. Many politically influential persons in Washington, D.C. echoed the concerns voiced in Seoul. While Washington's and Seoul's advocates of a 'soft,' gradual and non-violent transformation of North Korea welcomed the American NGO effort, those who championed the 'hard landing' approach assaulted it.

Advocacy, 1996–97

The intensity of these colliding political currents caught the American NGOs by surprise. They would have to explain their intentions not just to their home government, but even more importantly to the government of the population these sought to help. This was unprecedented for American NGOs working in East Asia.

The need to advocate their cause distracted from their desire to send aid. Consequently, the amount of aid American NGOs supplied in 1996 remained a relative trickle. CWS managed to send food, clothing and medicine worth \$1,550,380; and LDS \$327,750 worth of clothing, powdered milk, medicine and support to UNICEF. Mercy Corps sent fifty tons of grain. ADRA International, which included contributions from its U.S. chapter, amounted to \$230,000 in 1995 and then climbed to US \$2.29 million in 1996. Total US NGO food aid to North Korea in 1996, however, amounted to only 2,110 metric tons. At the time, the WFP estimated the need to be in excess of one million tons of grain.(11)

Initially, some American NGOs vented their frustration on the US government. They urged it to relax export barriers regarding North Korea. The reality remained, however, that the distance, logistics and various governments' bureaucratic impediments simply made sending food aid an expensive and labor intensive effort that yielded little benefit for the intended beneficiaries – the people of North Korea. NGOs working alone could afford to send only one or two containers full of grain, clothing and medicine at any one time. Doing so across the Pacific to North Korea proved expensive and complex. No international shipping lines frequented North Korean ports. Containers had to be transhipped either through China

or South Korea. In both countries, customs clearance procedures proved time consuming and customs duties expensive. From Chinese ports, the aid had to sit on docks for weeks awaiting the arrival of a North Korean cargo carrier. In South Korea, shipments from Pusan and Inchon to Nampo more often halted by the frequently shifting political winds of the Korean Peninsula.

Chart I. U.S. NGO Food Aid to DPRK 1996–2001

Metric Tons (M/T) Source: UN WFP

NGO	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	TOTAL
ADM	327				327		327
CHS	35	71					36
CWS	1,850		1,676	13			61
FHI	255		255				
FTC	180						
KASM	5,211		5,211				
KAP	360				360		

LDSC	___80	-----	_180	-----	1,000	-----
	1,260					
MCI	___50	__19	-----	-----	-----	-----
	__69					
SBAP	__160	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
---	_160					
UMCOR	-----	-----	_300	-----	-----	-----
	-----	_300				

WSC	-----	_868	-----	-----	-----	-----
---	_868					
WVI	1,640	1,040	_301	-----	-----	-----
	2,981					

Sub-total	2,110	8,501	1,281	-----	1,036	___96 12,024

The American NGO contribution to the international humanitarian effort excelled in areas other than the provision of food aid. (See charts I and II below.) Instead, the American NGOs concentrated on advocacy, particularly to encourage their government to send food aid, and in organizing and coordinating the international NGO effort. As evident from the chart below (see Chart I), American NGOs' contribution of food aid was never substantial relative to the amounts provided by governments and the NGOs of other nations. The NGO's of Europe, primarily through the IFRC and CARITAS, sent some 261,000 metric tons of grain, powdered milk, enriched soy blend, sugar, canned meat and fish, etc. NGOs in South Korea also contributed a large amount of food aid. More than two thirds of the 297,510 metric tons of food aid sent by South Korean NGOs, however, was provided by the South Korean Red Cross, a quasi-governmental organization.

Collective Action

Early on, the impediments and frustrations of shipping food to North Korea and dealing with the various governments' requirements convinced several NGOs to invest their resources elsewhere. In the spring of 1996, American NGOs began gathering at the InterAction headquarters in Washington, D.C. InterAction, formed in 1984, is a coalition of more than 150 US-based, relief, development and refugee agencies working in more than 100 countries. Member organizations are required to maintain the organization's rigorous ethical standards to ensure accountability to donors, professional competence and quality of service to those in need. Most of the organization's activities are funded by members' dues and private donations. An entirely private organization, since its inception, InterAction and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) have found it mutually beneficial to work together to quicken their response to humanitarian crises, and to maximize the positive impact of their combined resources. Consequently, USAID does provide the organization some financial support. But InterAction's fiscal resources are sufficient to preserve its independence from the US government.

InterAction's North Korea Working Group determined collective action – close cooperation, collaboration and coordination – would minimize the ability of any single government, particularly the one in Pyongyang, to manipulate their humanitarian efforts. At the same time, collective action would maximize their ability to negotiate with the North Korea government for what they sought – access to the North Korean people, and accountability and transparency for the distribution of their aid inside North Korea. They would further magnify the impact of their effort by aligning themselves with the UN relief agencies' experts in Pyongyang, and by establishing a network to facilitate communication and cooperation with NGOs in Europe, Japan and South Korea.

Chart II. Total Food Aid to DPRK

1995–2001 – 1,000 Metric tons

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	TOTAL
Govern		779.3	464.25	747.1	823.0	888.2	971.7 4,673,500
NGO	_65.2	185.6	260.1	_26.0	_48.9	1,011.3	_625,400
TOTAL	844.5	649.8	1,007.2		849.0	937.1	1,011.3 5,298,900

Source	Govern	NGO	TOTAL	% Total
Four Powers: USA	1,322,300	28.3%	12,024	1,334,324 25.2%
RoKorea	_789,700	16.9%	292,289	1,081,989 20.3%
Japan	_701,800	15.0%	_2,095	_703,895 13.3%

China	_618,500	13.2%	-----	_618,500	11.7%
Sub-total	3,432,300	73.4%	306,418	3,738,718	
	70.5%				

Europe	720,960	15.4%	261,065	982,025	18.5%
Middle East	370,150	7.9%	-----	370,150	7.0%
South/S.E. Asia	120,100	2.6%	_9,417	129,517	
North America	_29,800	0.6%	_48,500	_78,300	

Total	4,673,310	99.9%	625,400	5,298,710	

The Musgrove Movement

The InterAction North Korea Working Group, at Mercy Corps' behest, set in motion in the summer of 1996 a collaborative effort aimed at broadening the network of NGOs working in North Korea as well as establishing broad goals and a strategy for achieving them. Elsworth Culver convinced the ARCA Foundation, beneficiary of the Alcoa Aluminum corporation's endowment, to fund the first two international conferences on aid for North Korea. Victor Hsu of the NCCUSA headed the organization committee and convened the conference. Held at the ARCA Foundation's chairman's family retreat at Musgrove, Georgia, the conferences became known as Musgrove I and II. The US government was represented at each of the gatherings, as were several agencies of the United Nations. Representatives of the North Korean government were invited, but declined to attend.

The first conference met in December 1996. Some seventy five representatives from NGOs, governments and UN agencies gathered for two days to exchange experiences and contact information, and to discuss future priorities and strategies to deal with the humanitarian crisis in North Korea. The gathering was a resounding success for most of the participants. It immediately linked them into an international network of

NGO, afforded access to information about working conditions in North Korea, the status of programs and areas of future need. From the gathering emerged The Committee to Stop the Famine, which immediately initiated a coordinated advocacy program aimed at winning Congressional support for food aid for North Korea. The committee gained the attention and support of Congressman Tony Hall., the most influential and respect advocate for humanitarian assistance in the United States Congress.

Some NGOs, like the representative from the Eugene Bell Foundation, found the gathering frustrating. In this particular case, the individual ardently advocated his belief that only Korean-speaking NGOs could lead the effort in North Korea. Born in South Korea and virtually a native speaker of Korea, Dr. Stephen Linton made a bid to head the soon to be established FALU office in Pyongyang. The vast majority of NGOs, unfamiliar with the Korean language, rejected his proposal. For them, the greater need was to have an NGO from a politically neutral nation who had extensive experience as an NGO.(12) The majority of NGOs also found unacceptable Dr. Linton's contention that North Korea's inexperience in dealing with international organizations should excuse it from having to conform to the requirements of UN agencies and donor governments regarding transparency and monitoring of the food distribution system. On the contrary, most conference participants agreed that the North Korean government should feel obliged to do as all other aid recipient governments had done elsewhere and conform to international requirements and standards. Dr. Linton excused himself from the confederation of NGOs and ever since has opted to work independent from InterAction's members. Later, board members of the Eugene Bell Foundation asked him to leave their organization, and take the foundation's name with him. The board retained the foundation's assets and renamed itself Christian Friends of Korea (CFK). Dr. Linton eventually registered his foundation with the South Korean government and since has relied on it for financial support of its tuberculosis programs in North Korea.

Representatives from NGOs across North America, Europe and eventually South Korea and Japan attended Musgrove II in the fall of 1997. The second Musgrove Conference confirmed continuity of the annual gatherings and the consensus of the majority of NGOs, both in the United States and elsewhere, to coordinate, and where ever possible, to collaborate in the humanitarian effort in North Korea. The Musgrove Movement, to coin a term, spread internationally.

A new, key player emerged in 1997, the Korean American Sharing Movement or KASM. The non-profit, private voluntary organization was a loose association of some 500 organizations that represented 45,000 Korean Americans in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Washington, D.C., Atlanta and San Francisco. The movement had begun in the late winter of 1996–97 to raise money to send food and medicine to North Korea. The Washington–Baltimore Chapter raised \$100,000 in February, 1997 to purchase corn in China as aid for North Korea. Working with the Eugene Bell Centennial Foundation, this initial effort encountered all the logistical realities of shipping food. Obtaining a US government export license proved relatively easy. Purchasing quality grain in China and shipping it via railroad to North Korea proved far more challenging. Eventually, 300 metric tons, 200 tons less than originally planned, were sent to North Korea with the assistance of the IFRC. (13)

International NGO Conferences

After the 1997 gathering, a meeting convened in Seoul the next year, but the fourth conference was not held until May 1999 in Beijing, China in May 1999. For the first time, representatives of the Chinese government, academic institutions and social welfare organizations participated in the follow on conference held in Beijing in May 1999. The gathering quickly became a forum for identifying areas of common concern and publicly urging the appropriate authorities to take action to address these issues. (14) Also at the conference, UN officials then resident in Pyongyang called upon NGOs to shift their focus from food and other material aid to initiating programs consistent with the joint UN–DPRK Agricultural Recovery and Environmental Protection (AREP) Program. (15)

At the Beijing Conference, Japanese NGOs, long isolated from South Korean and American NGOs in their efforts to aid North Korea, eagerly sought to host the the 2000 International NGO Conference on North Korea. Their enthusiasm set the stage for the June 2000 conference in Tokyo, Japan. This gathering convinced USAID to build a bridge of global partnership between US and Japanese NGOs through the US–Japanese governments' long dormant public/private partnership or P3 initiative.(16)

Meanwhile, South Korean NGOs moved to assume leadership of the international NGO effort in North Korea by hosting the 2001 International NGO Conference on North Korea in Seoul, Korea. At the conclusion of the Seoul Conference, a consensus report was distributed to the press. In the

report, conference participants 'strongly endorsed' the South Korean government's engagement policy with North Korea, commended the European Union's efforts to provide humanitarian assistance, and urged the US and Japanese governments to continue their aid. The NGOs also urged the North Korean government to allow greater access to the North Korean people.

South Korean NGOs, understandably proud of their growing role since 1998 in addressing the humanitarian crises in North Korea, hosted the 2001 NGO conference in Seoul. The two day conference concluded with the participants approving a list of recommendations for future action.(17)

_ The South Korean government's policy of diplomatic engagement and economic cooperation with North Korea was strongly endorsed.

_ The European Union was urged to continue it's efforts to provide humanitarian aid to North Korea. The United States and Japanese governments were urged to move beyond food aid to more development-oriented assistance.

_ Cooperative and complementary programs among NGOs were encouraged.

Corporations were called upon to support the NGO humanitarian effort.

The Musgrove Movement established an international framework for the international NGO effort in North Korea. It set the precedent for annual gatherings of NGOs concerned about the humanitarian situation in North Korea, established a global network via email that facilitated cooperation, coordination and collaboration. In the United States, the extensive network of Korean-American NGOs was drawn into the mainstream of the American and international NGO movement. Through KASM, ties with one of South Korea's major NGO movements was formalized. The pooling of information enabled NGOs to establish aid priorities according to the greatest need of potential beneficiaries, rather than in response to either the requests of the

North Korean government or donors at home. Working together, the NGOs' advocacy of solutions to a multitude of concerns – financial, operational and strategic – had a much more constructive impact on governments and international organizations. At the same time, by closing ranks, the NGOs minimized the North Korea government's ability to manipulate them by playing one organization off against another.

FALU – Antecedent of the US PVOC

Paralleling the 'Musgrove Movement,' InterAction's North Korea Working group turned to the task of institutionalizing structures to deal with both the North Korean and US governments. This effort contributed to the formation of the Food Aid Liaison Unit (FALU as it is usually called) in Pyongyang, the USAID funded Private Voluntary Organization Consortium or PVOC to monitor the distribution of food for work aid in North Korea, and the privately funded Agriculture PVOC based at InterAction.

The Food Aid Liaison Unit or FALU, the first NGO funded and staffed consortium with an office and resident staff in Pyongyang, aspired to provide support to non-resident NGOs seeking accountability for the food aid they supplied to North Korea. Beginning with a staff of two in the spring of 1997, FALU grew to a staff of twenty international residents in Pyongyang with access to 158 of North Korea's 211 counties, or 81% of the population. FALU's attachment to the WFP magnified its ability to negotiate with DPRK authorities and to ensure close coordination with other elements of the international humanitarian effort. It also became a source of valuable information about conditions within the DPRK, procedures for dealing with the host government, and the areas of greatest need, both nutritionally and geographically.

This was not the first time that NGOs would coordinate their aid activities abroad, but it was the first time in the UN experience that an NGO operation became an integral part of the WFP's work and was accorded the status equivalent to a UN operation, according to Victor Hsu's recollection.

FALU's DPRK counterpart was the Flood Damage Rehabilitation Committee (FDRC). At the international relief effort's conception, Pyongyang's government established this inter-agency committee which brought together representatives of the Ministries of: Foreign Affairs,

Agriculture, Trade and Internal Security. All foreign relief agencies, including European and American NGOs, were required to work through FALU, except a small number of Korean–American Christian groups which earlier had established ties with the Korean Christian Federation. South Korean and Japanese NGOs were required to deal with the Korea Workers' (communist) Party's Asia–Pacific Peace Committee (APPC). The first American NGOs to begin work in North Korea were not required to deal with the FDRC. For example, the Nautitlus Institute worked with the KWP's APPC and Church World Services (CWS) dealt with Pyongyang's Korean Christian Federation.

US Private Voluntary Organization Consortium (PVOC)

American NGOs had numerous reasons for striving to establish a representative body in Pyongyang. Absent US government representation in North Korea, visiting American NGOs had to rely on the good will of resident UN agencies and FALU for operational assistance and advice regarding dealings with the DPRK government. The demands on both groups increased as the international humanitarian effort expanded in the fall of 1996 and spring of 1997. From the very beginning, American NGOs shared with international relief agencies and other nations' NGOs concerns about ensuring their distributions went to the most needy North Koreans. Most American NGO Board's of Directors require accountability and transparency regarding all aspects of the aid process so as to ensure maximum benefit to the intended beneficiaries. Equally important is maintaining donors' support. American NGOs belonging to InterAction also were intent upon meeting that organization's high standards regarding accountability. Having their own resident representatives in Pyongyang seemed the best way to achieve these goals on a cost effective and continuous basis.

USAID and the NGO North Korea Working Group in June 1997 jointly seized on the idea that the U.S. government, ... consider funding a representative from the U.S. NGO/PVO community to work with WFP/Pyongyang to establish an NGO Liaison Unit. Unable to establish an official presence in Pyongyang, USAID contracted American NGOs to monitor US food aid distributions. The need to ensure 'adequate monitoring' of food aid distributions, from its inception, was a cornerstone of the Clinton Administration's humanitarian policy toward North Korea. (18) A small group of American NGOs eagerly accepted the challenge. The

US government funding would enable them to do what they were already determined to do – ensure accountability through monitoring of their humanitarian aid distributions. Having US government backing for their group, or so they believed, would enhance their leverage when negotiating with authorities in Pyongyang.

The United States Private Voluntary Organization Consortium (US PVOC) was formed in June 1997. Its original members were: Amigos Internacionales, CARE, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), Mercy Corps and World Vision. The group was expanded in March 1999 to include ADRA, the Carter Center, Church World Service (CWS), KASM and LDS. US AID contracted first CRS, then CARE to manage the consortium. USAID's OFDA and the Department of Agriculture funded the consortium's activities with grants that eventually totaled approximately \$4.5 million, and material aid (food and medicine) worth \$55 million. (19)

The PVOC had two official goals: monitor the receipt and distribution of US government food aid in North Korea, and provide food to unemployed farm and factory workers living in urban areas where factories are closed or underutilized. Half of the food aid was to go to the Northeast provinces of North and South Hamgyong and Ryanggang. In North Korea, the PVOC members were to:

- _ Assess and approve food for work projects in collaboration with the FDRC at the national and local levels.

- _ Monitor the progress of work against plans that were developed by the county governments and from which the food allocation was based.

- _ Verify the delivery of food to the county warehouses and/or Public Distribution centers, witness the distribution of food from public distribution centers and verify that workers received food for the work they completed.

Work closely with WFP staff who provide all logistical support to the receipt and distribution of food from port to county warehouse.

Between August 1997 and June 2000, the PVOCs implemented five projects, four involving food for work (FFW) and one medical: (20)

Phase I – August to November 1997: A five member PVOC team monitored, under the WFP's authority in Pyongyang, distribution of 55,000 metric tons of US government purchased grain designated for children aged 7 to 17, and the elderly, with a quarter of the grain allocated to Food for Work programs. Of the 55,000 tons, 40% was sent to the northeast process of North and South Hamgyong, while the remainder was allocated to the southwest 'rice bowl' provinces. An estimated 3.7 million people benefitted from the food aid.

Phase II – February to August 1998: Three non-American medical professionals oversaw distribution of a \$5 million Office of Disaster Assistance project. Under UNICEF's auspices, essential drugs and medical supplies were distributed to children's institutions and pediatric hospitals. The effectiveness of the monitoring was undercut because the monitoring team reached North Korea before OFDA's shipment, precluding distribution of the medical supplies prior to the team's arrival as originally intended.

Phase III – June to October 1998: An eight member American team monitored distribution of 75,00 metric tons of grain for Food for Work (FFW) projects. Fifty projects in five provinces were completed, including reconstruction of sea dikes and coastal and river embankments. An estimated 1.5 million people benefitted from the five month program.

Phase IV – February to July 1999: Another eight member team monitored 75,000 metric tons of FFW grain. Virtually 40% of the food was distributed in connection with projects in the northeastern provinces. During the five month program, 90 projects in 88 counties in seven

provinces benefitted 1.6 million North Koreans.

Phase V – July 1999 to May 2000: This phase involved the first direct bilateral food aid program between the United States and North Korea. The previous four phases had been conducted in conjunction with UN agencies. Food aid totaling 100,000 metric tons was programmed to support FFW projects and a separate potato project that involved the planting of 1,000 tons of potato seed. Half of the food aid was sent to the northeastern provinces. Over the eleven month period, aid was distributed to 2.5 million persons who worked on 170 projects in 96 counties located in all of North Korea's provinces. The projects included the reforestation of 30,000 hectares of mountainside land, the repair of 500 kilometers of drainage canals, and the construction of 19 storage buildings and seven fish ponds.

The potato project fell far short of its intended objectives for numerous reasons discussed below.

The fundamental philosophy motivating the PVOC's projects was to use food aid to induce local officials to concentrate available labor on projects that would improve the agricultural infrastructure, and subsequently increase food production. The population would benefit additionally from the food aid that was provided as compensation for their labor. Over a three year period, the PVOC distributed 305,000 metric tons of US government purchased grain to 2.3 million North Koreans in 130 of 212 counties in eleven of 12 provinces and major cities. Forty percent of the aid was sent to the northeast provinces of North and South Hamgyong Provinces where the shortage of food was most critical among the industrial urban centers of Hamhung, Kimchaek and Chongjin. The Food for Work projects gave thirty four American team members more extensive geographical access to North Korea than previously achieved. These Americans also were able to work with local officials across North Korea.

The PVOC's Food for Work projects :

- _ reclaimed and/or protected more than 250,000 hectares (approximately 500,000 acres) of arable land,
- _ protected from future flooding an estimated 160,000 homes and public buildings,
- _ planted more than 20,000 hectares of deforested mountains and hillsides with tree seedlings,
- _ constructed some ten aquiculture facilities for the cultivation of fish, and
- _ spread fertile top soil over several thousand hectares of arable land.
- _ Half or more of the workers in these projects were women.

Constraints

From the beginning, consortium members, the Department of State and USAID recognized and publicly admitted that the North Korean government's constraints on the Consortium's activities 'prevented effective monitoring of a significant portion of food donations, ...' according to the 1999 US GAO Report. Nevertheless, the Consortium reported to USAID in 1997 and 1998, and told the GAO in 1999 that, 'while they felt that most food reaches the intended beneficiaries, the North Korean authorities prevented their effective monitoring of significant amounts of food distributed.' One might safely conclude that the issue was not one of 'adequate,' so much as one of degree of effective monitoring.

PVOC Working Conditions

North Korea is one of the most unpleasant places in the world for Americans to live and work. The hardship is more mental and psychological, although at times the physical hardship can be trying. As outlined above, North Korean suspicions and close monitoring of foreigners' activities make daily life stressful, especially for Americans who live in a free and open society. Personal perspective and personality were equally important factors. The FDRC representative assigned to the PVOC in the fall of 1999 was an ill tempered, hard drinking, tactless fellow. He had made life miserable for the first team of US Army personnel to enter North Korea as part of the US–DPRK Joint Recovery Operation for US Korean War dead. Complaints to the Foreign Ministry in July 1996 got him replaced. Unfortunately, he returned three years later to harass the PVOC. This fellow relished his ability to frustrate Americans. He denied them legitimate access to the few recreational facilities in Pyongyang – the zoo, bowling alley and similar facilities. . This individual lorded over the PVOC until the Foreign Ministry, at the behest of a visiting Mercy Corps representative, was replaced in April 2000. By then, however, the damage had been done. As a consequence of his arrogance and condescending attitude toward the last PVOC team, FDRC–PVOC relations were subjected to long term, unnecessary stress and petty minded bureaucratic despotism. (20)

Team members found the housing arrangement uncomfortable. For the first two years of its residency, the PVOC was housed in the Koryo Hotel. This is Pyongyang's premiere hotel. Its forty five story twin towers dominate central Pyongyang. The well maintained guest rooms are large, equipped with Western furniture, small refrigerator, and television. A choice

of restaurants is available. The basement has a bar, swimming pool, medical clinic and other services. A well stocked gift shop is accessible on the first floor, and there are pool tables on the second floor.

PVOC members, however, wanted to live in the diplomatic compound where other resident foreign NGO representatives resided. The American PVOC's, however, undercut their negotiating position in several ways. They repeatedly claimed they were being housed in the Koryo Hotel so that the DPRK government could receive as much hard currency as possible from the United States government. The room charge for the PVOC, however, was discounted, and the cost of their meals subsidized by the North Korean government. While insisting they should live in Pyongyang's diplomatic housing area, the PVOC members insisted they did not represent the U.S. government, although USAID paid their salary and all operational expenses. Such a claim, however, disqualified the PVOC from being housed with other foreign NGOs. Unlike the Americans, these NGOs had affiliated themselves with the UN agencies and the European Community Humanitarian Organization (ECHO), both of which had diplomatic status.

The final PVOC team was moved to the Foreign Ministry's guest house twenty kilometers southeast of Pyongyang. Just why remains unclear. The PVOC members believed the move was designed to isolate them from other foreigners in Pyongyang. Access to Pyongyang and its foreign community, however, was readily available in the PVOC's vehicles. The guest house's rooms are much larger than the hotels. Each room has a small refrigerator and television set. CNN news is available 24 hours a day, as is international telephone communication. The food is abundant, well prepared and inexpensive. The North Korea staff is bilingual, pleasant and intent on providing good service. There was a karaoke room equipped with the latest songs and a pool table. Beer and wine are available on a cash and carry basis. The house is situated on the north bank of the Taedong River and surrounded by a thick forest. PVOC members found the arrangement unacceptable.

Working conditions, like living arrangements, improved over time, but never measured up to PVOC members' preferences. Contact with North Koreans in distant rural areas, home visits and travel to the Northeast provinces all became realities by the spring of 2000. Restrictions on photography were relaxed, random interviews conducted with project workers, and visits made to Public Distribution System (PDS) centers where local authorities distributed grain rations.

Monitoring

As stated above, the PVOC was never permitted to fulfill USAID expectations of its monitoring responsibility because of the North Korean government imposed impediments. This did not mean, however, that food aid was being diverted from needy North Korean civilians to the nation's million man military. No one has ever produced verifiable evidence to support the claims of diversion. Some food aid is certain to have gone to the North Korean military. The amount, however, does not appear to have been so great as to make the practice evident. On the contrary, the WFP, based on the experience and extensive access of its twenty full time food monitors and a supporting staff of twenty six persons countered that diversions were unlikely because:

- the North Korean army and party elite have preferential access to national agricultural production (which is mainly rice and more desirable than the WFP's wheat donations,
- China and other countries provide food aid that can be used by the North Korean military and elite,
- the Army has its own agricultural production,
- there is a culture of respect for state authority, and
- intense regimentation of all sectors of society precludes theft.

Rather, the concern regarding monitoring is that the North Korean government never allowed the PVOC to fully implement the international accepted practices for the monitoring of food aid distribution. This is not surprising given North Korea's long history of refusing to cooperate with international norms. Nevertheless, this is not to say that the effort was futile. When food aid first arrived in North Korea in December 1995, there was one resident food monitor, the WFP resident representative. When the PVOC left North Korea in June 2000, the UN had 46 resident food monitors, a number which subsequently increased in 2002 to 52 monitors. ECHO had its own monitors, and the dozen resident NGO representatives augmented the resident monitoring corps. While the procedures for monitoring food distribution continue to fall short of international preferences, the number

of monitors has increased substantially, even taking into account the PVOCs departure. Despite all the criticism, the PVOC's presence provided the US government a greater capacity to monitor food aid distribution than without the consortium's six monitors. If anything, USAID's discontinuation of the PVOC has ended its ability to monitor its continuing disbursement of food aid to North Korea. (21)

Unkept Promises

PVOC members complained often and loudly that the FDRC did not fulfill the terms of the bilateral Memorandum of Understanding that governed their relations. Some of these complaints had merit. The FDRC was slow to improve working conditions, and often was unresponsive to PVOC concerns about visas, living conditions and the arbitrary decisions of their 'handler.' At the same time, however, the FDRC had legitimate complaints. Mutually agreed upon food aid delivery schedule were more often than not could not be maintained. Grain shipments frequently arrived from the United States weeks after their promised delivery date, complicating the FDRC's efforts to reserve domestic transportation for the timely distribution of the food aid. Hungry North Koreans suffered as a result. In some cases, the delay was caused by USAID's insistence that the food aid first be shipped to Pusan, Korea. There it often remained on the docks exposed to weather and rodents for weeks pending transshipment by a South Korean shipper to North Korea. Not until the PVOC's final year did USAID agree to allow direct shipment from the US to North Korea, something that had been legally possible for American shippers since the spring of 1996.

Negotiating Tactics

Here also there were problems on both sides. North Korea officials tend to respond slowly and negatively to the requests of foreigners. Not surprisingly, US officials do likewise regarding North Korea request. This may have something to do with individual concerns about not appearing to sensitive to the other side's needs. Doing so might encourage some to allege the responsive individual's loyalty to their 'own side' might be sagging. Equally plausible is the preference to impressive one's superiors with the assertiveness of one's stance when dealing with the 'other side.' Such an attitude more often than not results in confrontation with tempers aflame and problems compounded. On numerous occasions, PVOC team leaders attempted to solve problems by escalating the level of discussion. Rather than containing tempers and creating an atmosphere conducive to

resolution, escalation expands the number of personalities involved and draws into the discussion 'governmental' concerns. Several PVOC members believed they could improve work conditions for the PVOC through candid public revelation of their concerns during visits to the United States. These well intended, but ill expended energy played into the hands of those in Washington, DC intent upon ending or reducing food aid to North Korea. Such efforts only further compounded the problems. North Korean authorities responded to the harsh rhetoric emanating from Washington with their own unproductive rhetoric. (22)

Eventually, the spiral of accusations and counter-claims narrowed the options to one – discontinuation of the PVOC. In the end, this was a victory for those in Pyongyang who had opposed having resident American food monitors. For those in Washington who wanted to improve the monitoring, they ended up empty handed.

PVO Agricultural Consortium

While the US government funded PVOC Food for Work monitoring group received considerable attention, especially in Washington, DC, a much more successful working group within InterAction, the PVO Agricultural Consortium, implemented a series of highly successful, agriculturally sophisticated and logistically complex projects. Without US government funding, this entirely private NGO initiative successfully demonstrated to North Korea's Academy of Agricultural Sciences and Ministry of Agriculture, key elements in the formulation of Pyongyang's agricultural policy, the benefits of double cropping or planting a rapidly growing grain crop in the spring prior to the planting of corn in late spring and rice in early summer. The practice long been discontinued at the direction of former North Korean leader Kim Il Sung.

By pooling its resources and coordinating its efforts, the NGO consortium aimed to maximize its impact both on enhancing food production in North Korea and convincing the Pyongyang government to alter its conventional agricultural policy. The double cropping projects, instigated by the UNDP, aimed to reduce the North Korean people's dependence on foreign food aid by demonstrating to them ways to increase their own domestic production of grain. The NGO consortium cultivated various varieties of barley and winter wheat seed acquired in the United States and China. To determine the best climate and soil locations,

experimental plots were planted in several provinces with the cooperation of the UNDP, North Korean Academy of Agricultural Sciences and the Ministry of Agriculture. Much of the Consortium's work was concentrated at the Daechong Farm in Unpa County, North Hwanghae Province.

The effort was an international one. Mercy Corps' senior vice president Ellsworth Culver and Washington, DC representative Nancy Lindborg, both highly experienced in the area of humanitarian assistance, coordinated the activities of the InterAction based Agricultural Consortium. The Korean–American agricultural expert Dr. Joo served as the projects' field director. Born in North Korea but raised in South Korea, Dr. Joo was an American citizen who had obtained her Ph.D. in agronomy at Cornell University's international respected school in the agricultural sciences. Dr. Joo and her husband, a specialist in animal husbandry, began visiting North Korea in 1989 to offer advice on how to improve domestic grain production. Dr. Joo brought the first North Korean agricultural study tour to the United States in 1992 for a tour of American agriculture in the mid–west. Dr. Joo included training components consisting of technology exchange between leading agricultural research centers in the United States and the North Korean Academy of Agricultural Sciences. She and her NGO colleagues also sponsored several group tours for North Korean agriculture specialists to visit centers of agricultural research and agriculture related industries across the United States. In Pyongyang, the consortium worked closely with Roberto Christian, the world's leading foreign expert on agriculture in North Korea and a senior technical adviser to the UNDP.

Between 1997 and 1999, numerous American and South Korean NGOs contributed money, labor and materials to the agricultural consortium. The NGOs included: American Friends Service Committee, Canadian Food grains Bank, Join Together Society (Korean–Americans from New York), Korean American Sharing Movement, Latter Day Saints Charities, Lutheran World Relief, Mennonite Central Committee, Mercy Corps, World Vision, South Korean Presbyterian Church and the Korea Sharing Movement. It is important to note that several NGOs represented on the USAID PVOC were not involved with this Agricultural PVOC, including: ADRA, Amigos Internationale, CARE, the Carter Center, Catholic Relief Services, and Church World Services.

The Agriculture PVOC made several significant contributions during its two and one half years of effort. It wed the humanitarian effort of an international consortium of NGOs from the United States, Canada, and

South Korea to agricultural expertise in these nations, the UNDP and in North Korea. It introduced North Korea's formulators of agricultural policy to new farming methods and materials through technology exchange, training and study tour programs.

Ultimately, the North Korean government adopted the consortium's double cropping methods on a national basis. Additionally, the consortium's efforts produced tens of thousands of tons of seed and food from its crops of barley and winter wheat. Alas, this success had gone largely unnoticed because of the failure of the so-called 'potato project.'

Potato Project

This undertaking was one of the most controversial and least productive of the USAID funded PVO agricultural projects. The DPRK Academy of Agricultural Sciences initiated the concept in a proposal to the UNDP in January 1999 entitled, 'The Development of the System for Virus-free Potato Seed Production.' Dr. P. Kim Joo recast the proposal and forwarded it to the InterAction Agricultural Working Group in February 1999. Her proposal called for the planting of 1,000 metric tons of seed potato on 500 hectares of land to produce 20,000 metric tons of potatoes, a harvest sufficient to feed 55,000 people one kilogram of potatoes per day over a one year period, or to be used as seed for planting at the beginning of the next crop year. By early March, 1999, the majority of the 12 members of the PVO Food Consortium (PVOC) and InterAction Agricultural Working Group expressed either a strong interest or commitment to the project. Dr. Joo originally estimated the project would cost \$754,800. Eventually, the project cost \$1 million, of which the Consortium paid 60% and the U.S. government the remainder.

This well intended project was plagued with problems from the beginning. Once the costs had ballooned, only US government funding could make the project possible. USAID was willing to fund the proposal, but first certain political considerations had to be resolved. Specifically, North Korea had to agree to allow a US government team to inspect a suspected secret underground nuclear facility. Agreement on this highly visible and politically sensitive issue was not reached until March 16, 1999. Because of the US government's funding of the project, a joint US government, PVOC delegation traveled to Pyongyang to negotiate the terms of the potato project. An understanding was not reached until April 17.

The potato seed needed to be planted by mid-May, given North Korea's short growing season. Consortium representatives, at great expense, acquired potato seeds in Colorado and China. The Colorado seed had to be airlifted to North Korea. The Chinese seed potatoes were readily available, but transporting them to North Korea proved problematical because of China's long standing reluctance to make shipments via rail to North Korea since North Korea tended to be reluctant to return the rail cars to China. Unfortunately, some of the Chinese potato seed proved to have a virus that rendered it useless. Heavy rains just before the potatoes were to have been harvested caused much of the crop to rot in the ground. The project proved costly, controversial and unproductive. Nevertheless, the lessons learned from the experience convinced the North Korean government to continue expanding potato production. Today, potatoes form a still growing element of North Korea's annual food production.

Changing Directions

The American NGO engagement of North Korea continues, but with significant changes. The number of NGOs peaked in 1999, and has since subsided. None have had resident representatives in Pyongyang since June 2000. As the number has declined, the network of NGOs centered at InterAction has loosened considerably. The North Korea Working group still gathers, occasionally. There is less involvement with food aid. Increasingly since 1998, many large scale American NGOs shifted their focus from food aid to specialized pursuits focused on reforestation, renewable energy, medicine, specialized farming technics and educational exchange. Korean-American professional medical associations have excelled in sending advanced medical equipment and conducting medical training programs in North Korea. American Friends Service Committee has conducted training programs in medical sciences and agronomy, and maintains to collective farms. Christian Friends of Korea and the South Korean based NGO Eugene Bell Foundation specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis. The Asia and the Sequella Foundations, together with Catholic Relief Services, supplement these efforts. The Asia Foundation initiated a program in international business law in December 1998. The Nautilus Institute has specialized in renewable energy development, and Mercy Corps has established an apple orchard with twenty thousand trees.

American NGO involvement in North Korea has declined and is unlikely to again return to its peak level of 1999. The reasons are certainly too many to catalogue comprehensively here. A representative list will suffice. The incumbent Bush Administration has been much less supportive of NGO involvement in North Korea than its predecessor. The need for the services of American NGOs in North Korea has declined. A major reason for this is the South Korean government's increasing willingness to supply some of North Korean agriculture's most critical needs, and the maturing network of South Korean NGOs capable of distributing this aid inside North Korea. Meanwhile, USAID has shifted the focus of American NGOs toward Afghanistan because of the urgent and substantial need there for humanitarian aid.

The international community's efforts to rebuild North Korea's capacity to cultivate more food have stabilized grain production through crop diversification, better use of fertilizers and pesticides, and repair and improvement of the agricultural infrastructure. The North Korean government, after nearly two decades of ignoring agriculture, has resumed investment of scarce fiscal resources in the agricultural sector. The irrigation system is being shifted from an electricity dependent to a gravity fed one. Farm fields are being rationalized for more efficient use of farm machinery, some of which South Korea is supplying. North Korea's income from the Diamond Mountain tourist business has increased the nation's ability to purchase fuel from China to power farm equipment. Rice and maize production have stabilized while more farm land is planted in potatoes, barley and wheat. Fish farming has been adopted, small animal husbandry improved with the introduction of rabbits from Italy and geese from China. New seeds, herbicides and pesticides have also been introduced.

The international humanitarian community, in which American NGOs performed and still play a prominent role, merits credit for many of these improvements. Much of the American NGOs effectiveness in North Korea between 1996 and 2000 likewise has many reasons. Only some of the more likely explanations need be listed here. The United Nations' relief agencies made it possible for American NGOs to engage North Korea and to establish viable programs within this once cloistered nation. Worthy of particular note are the resident representatives of the World Food Program such as Trevor Page and David Mortin, UNDP's technical expert Roberto Christian, and World Health Organization representative Eigel Sorensen. They provided American NGOs invaluable insight into the situation in North Korea, the nation's most pressing needs and assistance and support in

dealing with North Korea's formidable bureaucracy and the deeply rooted suspicions of all North Koreans toward foreigners.

The Korean–American community deserves special praise for its pioneering work in establishing bridges of communication between the United States and North Korea. The willingness of InterAction's North Korea Working Group set the precedent for cooperation and collaboration that ultimately evolved into an international network of NGOs in North America, Europe and East Asia working together to address the food and health crises of the North Korean people. As InterAction North Korea Working Group walked the political tight rope between Seoul and Pyongyang, Pyongyang and Washington, and the squabbling political factions within the United States, it concentrated on its primary goal – providing the humanitarian assistance to the maximum number of needy North Koreans. Along the way, it established an enduring international network of NGOs, and developed and implemented a strategy that emphasized collaboration between NGOs, governments and international relief agencies. Ultimately, the strategy accented self help through food for work programs, the promotion of self sustainable agricultural practices and restoration of forests and watershed.

ENDNOTES

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3. Lola Nathanail, 'UN WFP Food and Nutrition Assessment – DPRK – March 16 – April 24, 1996. p. 10.

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5. Discussion with members of this organization.

6. When this small group of American NGOs arrived at the Koryo Hotel, State Department officer Kenneth Quinones was eating supper. With his assistance, the group was able to meet with officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Russ Keer, Vice President for Relief and Rehabilitation of World Vision International, visited North Korea one week later, February 20–24, 1996 accompanied by Dr. Stephen Linton, then a researcher at Columbia University. Source: Russ Kerr, 'DPRK WVI Trip Report,' February 25, 1996. For assessments of the food situation see: Republic of Korea Government information sheet dated January 23, 1996, 'Assessment of North Korea's Food Shortage.' Also see: Larry Niksch, 'North Korean Food Shortages: U.S. and Allied Responses: Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, April 11, 1996. Also: Center for the Advancement of North Korean Human Rights, 'man-made Famine in North Korea,' Seoul, Spring 1998.

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