

Joyce Payer, Student Participant  
Des Moines Central Campus  
Des Moines, Iowa

## Nutrition Insecurity in North Korea Caused by Poor Government

Hunger and lack of nutritional security are problems that have plagued the world since the beginning of mankind. From the greatest developed countries to the smallest underdeveloped countries, all have faced this battle at one or more points in history. However, what many of the underdeveloped countries lack is the ability to plan for the future. The Green Revolution is a program that aims to increase the agricultural outlooks for countries through better, sustainable, crops and the introduction of more advanced means of taking care them. By improving a country's understanding of fertilizers, irrigation techniques, and equipment used to harvest crops, the Green Revolution hopes to also improve the country's prospects for feeding its people in the future. One major project is the development of high-yielding seeds. Stronger crops that can increase a country's harvest by producing more per plant are vital for developing countries with relatively little land. However, not all nations choose to accept the aid and ideas offered by the Green Revolution. Some governments are the sole reason for their nation's poverty, and the only way to end their failure is through radical changes in their attitudes and policies. This is the case with The Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Present day North Korea is one of the most closeted societies in history. Due to the communist leadership of Kim Jong Il, very few facts are admitted to the outside world, and those that are cannot always be trusted as accurate. The Korean peninsula's main crops include rice, potatoes, and maize. Although an estimated 34% of North Korea's labor force is in agriculture, they still are unable to produce adequate rations for the population of 23.1 million. (CIA) In contrast, only 6.4% of its prosperous Southern counterpart's labor force is in agriculture. Despite the large difference, South Korea's economy outperforms that of North Korea by thirteen-fold. (Turner) Looking at facts like these, it is evident that something in North Korea's way of operating must be changed.

The reason for North Korea's current state institution dates back to 1948, when the collective nation of Korea was split along the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel into what is now The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North), and the Republic of Korea (South) following the Japanese occupation. The Soviet Union aided North Korea in becoming a communist state, as Kim Il Song worked his way to Prime Minister, and eventually took the title of President in 1972. During the early years of its independence, North Korea's economy prospered, although the people were ruled with the many regulations of a communist regime. The agricultural responsibilities, however, were all placed on the lower classes of society—those without land or money. None of these people were allowed to own their own farms, since everything was run as a co-operative system. Smaller farms were soon consolidated into larger, state-owned, and state-run institutions, which is how they are run still today.

Throughout, and directly following, the Korean War, Kim Il Song continued to expand his nation's military with help from the Soviet Union. But although he agreed with many Marxist ways of life, Kim also thrived to attain an independence and self-reliance in North Korea. Unfortunately for him, Soviet backing soon fell through, and the economic prosperity achieved in the 1970's spiraled into reverse. Because it had no exports to speak of, North Korea was unable to cover the quadrupling of oil prices at that time. In an attempt to acquire money, the government invested in the mining of minerals, only to be left deeply in debt when the minerals' values dropped. The expansive military became a financial burden since North Korea had no connections with countries for potential aid. (History of North Korea)

Current North Korea is lead by Kim Jong Il, son of Kim Il Song, and is still deeply in debt. Despite this, nearly one fourth of the country's money is spent supporting its armed forces and nuclear weapons, while the standard of living for the remaining population is drastically declining. Because of the lack of funds, the nation cannot afford to introduce many of the technological and modern advances supported by the Green Revolution. As a result, they are not capable of feeding their own people, and are faced with widespread floods and famine. Between 1996-1999, North Korea experienced a famine of immense proportions. While the exact numbers of deaths remain unknown, estimations vary from one half to three million. (Foster-Carter) Even more recently was the flood in the summer of 2006. North Korean papers gave reported losses of only a few hundred lives, but South Korean sources claim that the losses reach close to 55,000 casualties, along with nearly 2.5 million loosing their homes. (ABC) Bridges and roads were also demolished during the flooding, making distribution of food and supplies to needy even more difficult. (2006 North Korea flooding) They are not alone, though. South Korea has also experienced some of the same natural disasters. But even though they experienced casualties from these occurrences, they were not from famine, as the majority of North Korea's were. (Foster-Carter)

Because of its lack of money and good leadership, and the string of natural disasters, North Korea has survived on the handouts and good will of other countries and organizations. American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) has provided \$2 million worth of farming equipment to several large farm co-operatives over the past decade, along with half a million dollars worth of food and clothing. (AFSC) After the last flood, South Korea also donated \$230 million to North Korea, including 80,000 blankets and medical supplies, and almost 100,000 tons of rice. (CBS) China has even decided to lend a helping hand during this hardship. They have reportedly offered to give North Korea aid in the form of medicine, foods and grains, diesel, and oil. (Asia-Pacific News)

Despite the bountiful assistance put forth by the world, North Korea falls short of providing for its people. Due to an increase in oil prices, which limit the use of larger farm equipment, the leaders grew so desperate that they recently ordered city and government workers to mobilize to farms in an effort to boost crop production. (Korea Times) The UN has recently stated that if North Korea fails to find even more support from outside sources, it will run out of food within the next two months. It is difficult for the North Korean people to find such support, however, because of the poor choices made by their government. North Korea has referred to itself as a nuclear power, and willfully withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) to test missiles and because of that, many nations are wary about providing aid.

Another reason for the lack of support is due to North Korea's restrictive nature. The entrance and exodus of people is closely regulated, along with the distribution of goods. Any supplies being provided by an outside country are to be given to the North Korean government, not to the people. The problem, however, is the doubt that the government actually gives the supplies to the people. In many communist nations, provisions are first given to the government officials. After they collect their portion, the rest is distributed to the armed forces. The last people to receive nourishment are the ones who need it the most—the laborers, women, and children. If the government would allow organizations to enter and directly distribute goods to the population, North Korea might not find itself in the position it is in today.

As stated previously, the main reason for North Korea's current state of failure is the dictatorship behind it. The most obvious proof of this can be attained by comparing it to its sister nation, South Korea, which has nearly identical geographical traits. Both Koreas possess approximately 2,500 km of coastline, with North Korea's total land mass actually surpassing the South's by 40,000 square km. Since the geographical location of both countries is congruent, both experience temperate climates with rainy summers. Mountains and coastal plains can also be found in either country. (CIA)

With 14,600 square km of irrigated land and 30% of its work force in agriculture, North Korea has the makings of a successful agriculture program. (CIA) While it exclusively might not be able to feed the entire nation, it should be capable of generating enough produce to keep the nation out of extreme famine. What stands between them and prosperity is the national debt caused by poor leadership. How else would South Korea, with smaller numbers in irrigated land and farmers, be so successful in comparison? The average income for a citizen in the south is about \$20,400. A Northern citizen is lucky to receive an income of 5% of the former, a sum around \$1,700. (CIA) South Korea is a nation with a booming economy and plenty of supplies to care for its people. The reason for this is the governance. While North Korea strives so desperately to become self-sufficient, South Korea embraces foreign trade in order to provide the items it cannot produce. South Korea is continually growing and expanding its economy as North Korea only expands its debt.

If The Democratic People's Republic of Korea was to open up its land to surrounding countries, and accept the treaties and organizations formed by them, the results could be very optimistic. The borders are so closely guarded today because the country fears losing people to the grandeur and wealth of its neighbors, but if North Korea could provide the same security itself, it would have nothing to fear. If people were free to own businesses and land for themselves they would not resent living in the country.

Another step towards rehabilitating North Korea includes decreasing the current budget for the armed forces. This nation has one of the largest military programs for a country its size, and spends a large section of its money on excessive nuclear missile programs and testing. If the leaders of North Korea were able let their guards down enough to form positive alliances with stronger countries, they would not feel a need for such an expansive security system. Once the troops are cut back, many positive changes can happen. Firstly, the men and women serving can join the nation's labor force. The increase in working people will boost the economy, creating more jobs and positions to fill. Also, the allowance set aside for national security, through nuclear and missile testing, can be lessened. Part of the unused money should be used to pay off national debts, while the rest can be used so help supplement the food and medical budget of citizens.

Once the two stated plans have been carried out, and the people taken care of, North Korea can finally focus on its future. After climbing out of debt, a portion of the country's budget can be put toward the Green Revolution's ideas and concepts. With the use of more modern farm equipment, better fertilizers, and irrigation techniques, larger quantities of crops can be grown and tended by fewer people, increasing production. Money can also be put toward the development of stronger crops suitable for the conditions in North Korea. Also, the large state-run farm co-operatives should be split up among the people working there. When China allowed individual farmers to decide what to grow, and how to market it, the country's agricultural production raised from 2.6% to 7.1%. (von Braun) If North Korea would do the same, not only would it become more prosperous, the people would once again have a sense of pride in their work. Then, with the correct knowledge and foundation, North Korea can grow to once again being more self-sufficient.

These changes cannot be expected to happen overnight, however. It is doubtful that the North Korean leaders will approve of such drastic change. Therefore, other nations and organizations, such as the United Nations, should be willing and prepared to help initiate these plans. Since direct attack or invasion would only lead to more fatalities and resentment on the part of North Korea, the best proposal is for the country to be included in more peaceful, non-political activities. By participating in international athletic events and attending multi-cultural conventions, they can hope to kindle friendships and positive associations with other countries. When North Korea can feel like it is not in danger of attack during these times, it will be more comfortable and likely to entertain outside political meetings, too. Hopefully it can gain a sense of the vast opportunities it is missing by secluding itself from the world, and understand the great need for immediate improvement.

The Green Revolution is an awesome movement that will undoubtedly help much of the world from becoming agriculturally insufficient. However, the benefits can only be attained by those countries and governments willing to accept its concepts. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea needs to overcome its history of poor leadership and turn a new page of prosperity and health for its people. The road to success is not a short one, so steps must be taken immediately. By forming an open, stable government and decreasing the emphasis put on military dominance, the country stands to strengthen itself in the long run. That said, money once used for excessive military defense can then be put toward the agricultural program and accomplishing the goals put forth by the Green Revolution. The state-run farms should be split up among the workers, helping to give a sense of pride to individuals, which will, in turn, raise the morale of the country. Through these actions, and with help and support from the rest of the world, the people of North Korea can hope to once again live without the fear of famine and poverty.

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