Building Trust on the Margins of Inter-Korean Relations: Revitalizing the Role of South Korean NGOs

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Even though we are undergoing tough times, I urge all my fellow citizens to place confidence in the Administration so that we will be able to come together to overcome difficulties. As an old saying goes, "Many hands make light work," I hope all of us will be able to pull together especially in times of difficulty so that united efforts will create synergy.[1]

– Park Geun-hye, President of ROK

A major objective of the new Park Geun-hye government's "Trust Building Process on the Korean Peninsula" is to build trust with North Korea. How can South Korea realistically begin to achieve this objective? From a sociological understanding of "trust" as a process and the humanitarian mandate of improving the quality of life for the average North Korean, I argue that Seoul must trust in its own civil society and therefore create greater space for more immediate South Korean non-governmental engagement with North Korea. Empowering South Korean NGOs to (re)engage in select projects that reach ordinary citizens in the DPRK is critical for the long-term inter-Korean reconciliation and trust building. Building trust with North Korea will require multidimensional connectivity and sustained engagement less susceptible to the 'noise' of high-level politics.

Key words: South Korea-North Korea relations, trust-building, non-governmental organizations, civil society, engagement

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1. "Address by President Park Geun-hye on the 68th Anniversary of Liberation," *Joongang Daily*, August 15, 2013, http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com.

Introduction

In the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea), "trust" has become the catchword of the new Park Geun-hye government. Building trust is the core of President Park's foreign, national security, and Korean unification policies. Building trust with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea)is a major aim of Seoul's "Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula," a process which represents the peninsular fork of a three-pronged *Trustpolitik* to improve inter-Korean relations, supposedly with a greater focus on ordinary people and civil society.[2]

President Park's "trust-building process" has received somewhat favorable reviews; nevertheless, despite being lauded as fundamentally sound, the policy is said to face serious challenges in its operationalization, including domestic challenges.[3] At a glance, the new policy may appear as a paradigm shift compared to past ROK governments' North Korea policy, supposedly putting more emphasis on the impor-

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2. Park Geun-hye, "*Trustpolitik* and the Making of a New Korea," November 15, 2012, at www.piie.com/blogs/nk/?p=8088 (accessed March 23, 2013). As stated in her inaugural address on February 25, 2013: "Through a trust-building process on the Korean Peninsula I intend to lay the groundwork for an era of harmonious unification where all Koreans can lead more prosperous and free lives and where dreams can come true. I will move forward step-by-step on the basis of credible deterrence to build trust between the South and the North. Trust can be built through dialogue and by honoring promises that have already been made." "Full Text of Park's Inauguration Speech," *Yonhap News*, February 25, 2013. For discussion on the policy's regional and global aspects, see Lim Soo-Ho, "Park Geun-Hye's Northeast Asia Policy: Challenges, Responses, and Tasks," SERI Quarterly, April 2013, pp. 15–21.

3. David C. Kang, "The North Korean Issue, Park Geun-hye's Presidency, and the Possibility of Trust-building on the Korean Peninsula," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2013), pp. 1–21; Chung Min Lee, "The Park Geun-hye Administration's Foreign and Security Policy Challenges," *Korea Chair Platform*, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), May 1, 2013, www.csis.org/program/korea-chair; Ihn Hwi Park, "President Park Geun-Hye's North Korea Policy: Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula," *Journal of Peace and Unification*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 2013), p. 138.

tance of the happiness of individuals and their quality of life[4] and on striking a balance between policies of former governments, whose policies and their implementations have been criticized for relying too heavily on either providing unreciprocated largess or applying pressure.[5] Unlike her predecessors' policies, President Park's is heralded as one that combines toughness with flexibility, building "trust" with North Korea in alignment with international efforts to strengthen security and cooperation. The policy advocates a strong posture of deterrence against North Korean provocations, but offers Pyongyang a fresh start through the promise of joint projects of enhanced cooperation (including social overhead capital), continued humanitarian assistance (separate from political issues), and new trade and investment opportunities. Nevertheless, the policy seeks to be transformative, as the incentives are largely dependent on Pyongyang's efforts toward denuclearization and earning Seoul's trust.

Rightfully, however, some scholars have questioned whether the new policy is based on a grave misperception of the nature of the North Korean regime. "Trust can only be built if there is some commonality of norms and values. North Korean leaders only respect power, and have absolutely no respect for norms or values. . . . Moreover, they believe that others act in precisely the same way that they do. From their perspective, international law and institutions have no merit in themselves, but are just used as instruments of power to achieve

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4. Jinwook Choi, "The Trust-building Process on the Korean Peninsula: A Paradigm Shift in Seoul's North Korea Policy," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2013), pp. 23–52.

5. That is, the progressive Presidents Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun's engagement policies that overlooked the importance of building domestic consensus both in the political arena and in civil society were largely criticized as unreciprocated "appeasement," especially after the engagement policies failed to curb North Korea from conducting a nuclear test. The conservative President Lee Myung-bak's "principled engagement" (i.e., "Vision 3000") — where economic, humanitarian, and political benefits were conditioned on North Korea's progress toward denuclearization and economic reform — led to a freeze in inter-Korean relations.

certain objectives."[6] Likewise, in terms of influencing North Korea to denuclearize and reform, the viability of Park's policy will hinge more on Washington's willingness to negotiate with Pyongyang on the nuclear issue and Beijing's recalibration of its North Korea policy "rather than a sea-change in Pyongyang's grand strategy," and therefore operationalization of the policy may require strategic patience.[7] Furthermore, Iran's recent perceived success at negotiations in Geneva with the United States and major powers on gaining recognition of its right to develop a civilian nuclear program (including a uranium enrichment capability)[8] could embolden Pyongyang to holdout for a deal laden with more immediate, direct, and substantial payoffs.

If we acknowledge these criticisms and current circumstances, then how can South Korea realistically go about building trust with North Korea, especially in the short term?

It is important to remember that North Korea is more than just the Kim-family regime and the elites in Pyongyang. Likewise, South Korea is more than its government but is also its civil society and the synergy effects the two can create together under democracy. In this light, the advent of President Park's new approach leads us to ask two questions: What is "trust"? How can Seoul utilize South Korean civil society through its nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to go about initiating trust-building with North Korea in the short term?

In this article I argue from a sociological perspective that trust is a social construct in which trust-building should be seen as a process, rather than as a variable, involving multidimensional connectivity and therefore a multiplicity of actors. From that notion, space needs to be made and support provided to allow for South Korean civil

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6. Christoph Bluth, "'Trustpolitik' and 'Alignment': Assessing Park Geun-hye's New Approach to North Korea," CanKor, October 12, 2011, http://vtncankor.wordpress.com (accessed July 15, 2013).
7. Chung Min Lee, "The Park Geun-hye Administration's Foreign and Security Policy Challenges."
8. Michael R. Gordon, "Officials Say Toughest Work on Iran's Nuclear Program Lies Ahead," *New York Times*, November 24, 2013.

society to be involved more actively in the inter-Korean trust-building process sooner rather than later. Specifically, NGOs must be allowed and encouraged to reengage in select projects that increase people-to-people contacts and exchanges as well as projects that try to directly benefit the ordinary people in North Korea. The conservative government in Seoul should look 'outside the box' with a vision to promote and support South Korean NGO (re)engagement with North Korea even while it seeks high-level political solutions to the issue of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.

This article proceeds as follows. The next section examines the nature of "trust" and "trust building," followed by an assessment of Seoul's "Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula." The third section considers the experience of NGO engagement with North Korea in attempt to gauge to what extent South Korean NGOs can be engaged to help forward a trust-building process. The section also provides some recommendations for possible areas that such reengagement with the DPRK might entail. The conclusion points out some of the shortcomings of such approach and summarizes the argument.

Inter-Korean Relations and the 'Trust Building Process'

Trust as a Process and the Power of Generosity

Trust is a social construct, built between people and societies. When trust is present, it releases the parties to the relationship to consider a complexity of actions for cooperation otherwise inconceivable. But building trust takes a long-term effort. It involves many things including working with respect, having good communication, foregoing the blame game, moving forward with noble intentions, and getting beyond one's own self-interest.

Trust is treated differently by scholars of different fields. From an international relations' perspective, one might define trust as a belief that the other side is trustworthy, or willing to reciprocate cooperation

(as opposed to preferring to exploit one's cooperation).[9] Sociologists might conceptualize trust as a mental process comprising the elements of expectation, interpretation, and suspension.[10] Scholars of organizational studies may look at trust from a relational standpoint, defining it as one party's willingness to leave itself vulnerable to the actions of another party, with the expectation that the second party will perform a particular action irrespective of the first party's ability to monitor or control the second party.[11]

However, as Khodyakov points out, most social scientists do not view trust as a process. Some regard trust as an independent variable, and therefore are primarily concerned with its benefits; others view it as a dependent variable, looking at what directly impacts the development and maintenance of trust. Yet a few sociologists argue against a "utilitarian usage of trust as a 'medium' or 'glue' that holds relationships and societies together" and instead emphasize "the dynamic foundation of trust, which involves the idea of trust building." In this latter valuation trust is seen as "a social practice and process because it involves the responsibility of both parties, commitment to the relationship, and the possibility of social change: to trust is to anticipate that the other party will exhibit benevolence supported by moral competence in the form of loyalty, generosity, and honesty."[12]

From this understanding, Khodyakov describes trust as composed

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9. Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005). For a general and recent discussion on the concept of trust in international relations theory, see Richard Ned Lebow, "The Role of Trust in International Relations," *Global Asia*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Fall 2013), www.globalasia.org/Issue/ArticleDetail/460/The-Role-of-Trust-in -International-Relations-.html.

10. Guido Mollering, "The Nature of Trust: From Georg Simmel to a Theory of Expectation, Interpretation and Suspension," *Sociology*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (2001), pp. 403–420.

11. Roger C. Mayer, James H. Davis, and F. David Schoorman, "An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust," *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (1995), pp. 709–734.

12. Dmitry Khodyakov, "Trust as a Process: A Three-Dimensional Approach," *Sociology*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (2007), pp. 124–127.

of three distinct dimensions: thick interpersonal trust, thin interpersonal trust, and institutional trust. 'Thick interpersonal trust' can be thought of as originating in relationships of 'strong ties' such as those between family members and close friends. The personalities of the trustor and trustee are crucial because in this type of trust personal familiarity and strong emotional commitment to the relationship are required. On the other hand, 'thin interpersonal trust' emerges between people who do not know each other well and relies on 'weak ties'. Underpinning this type of trust is the assumption that the trustee will reciprocate and comply with the trustor's expectations of the trustee's behavior, and with existing formal and ethical rules. Such trust is associated with high risks but it can provide substantial benefits if reciprocated. Finally, institutional trust differs from the other two in that the impersonal nature of institutions makes its creation difficult; it therefore depends on the perceived legitimacy and technical competence of the institutions, and their ability to perform assigned duties. Nevertheless, in modern society institutional trust is often more important than the other two forms because of the resources institutions can generally deliver to people so that they can achieve some of their goals.[13]

With these dimensions constantly changing, Khodyakov argues that it makes more sense to treat trust "not as a variable with different levels of strength, but rather as a process of its creation, development, and maintenance." Therefore, a definition of trust, viewed as a form of agency,[14] can be defined as follows: "a process of constant imaginative anticipation of the reliability of the other party's actions based on (1) the reputation of the partner and the actors, (2) the elevation of current circumstances of action, (3) assumptions about the partner's

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13. Ibid., pp. 120–124.
14. Here Khodyakov relies on M. Emirbayer and A. Mische's definition of agency as "the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments . . . which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgment, both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations." Dmitry Khodyakov, op cit., pp. 125–126.

actions, and (4) the belief in the honesty and morality of the other side." Such a definition reflects the idea of temporality and accounts for rational and non-calculative dimensions of human behavior.[15]

In addition to this understanding of trust, I would add that the power of generosity should also be recognized. As Klapwijk and Van Lange assert, generosity plays an underestimated functional role in helping to communicate and build trust in 'noisy' situations — that is, to mitigate the misunderstanding, distrust, or negative reciprocity caused by 'noise,' which are the unintended errors that affect interactions — when the trustee in the relationship behaves less cooperatively than the trustor intended.[16] In this sense, I suggest that generosity need not necessarily mean the provision of physical resources, but can include such intangibles as patience, understanding, and flexibility. This is not to advocate or imply excess and blind openhandedness, or a diminution of reciprocity or verification; on the contrary, reciprocity and verification are equally essential to trust building. However, a trustor should be attuned to the fact that all interactions are affected by 'noise,' and therefore apply generosity in some form and degree when such application can foster the relationship or prevent it from needless setbacks due to 'noise' or a rigidness to strict reciprocity or strict verification.

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15. "The idea that trust is a process of an 'imaginative anticipation' goes beyond the rational choice perspective in that it stresses the notion of imagination, which implies that people cannot accurately predict the future, but are able to hypothesize about it. . . . The above definition of trust also implies the existence of a non-calculable dimension of human behavior. People do not always view each other as being totally driven by the desire to maximize their own profits, as rational choice theorists would argue. People are not able to be completely rational in their decisions because they act in an environment characterized by everlasting uncertainty, fast changes, and risk. The unpredictability of the long-term future often encourages people to rely more on the honesty and morality of their partners than on their ability to act rationally." Dmitry Khodyakov, op cit.

16. Anthon Klapwijk and Paul A. M. Van Lange, "Promoting Cooperation and Trust in 'Noisy' Situations: The Power of Generosity," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 96, No. 1 (January 2009), pp. 83–103.

Seoul's 'Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula' and Pyongyang's Response

The leaderships in Seoul and Pyongyang have been in hostile competition for legitimacy since the division of Korea in 1945. North and South Korean societies have been estranged for over half a century, having virtually no contact with each other. In this context of inter-Korean relations, where can the trust building start?

According to the ROK Ministry of Unification (MOU), the Park administration's Trust-building Process calls for "trust between the North and South," "public confidence in the ROK government," and "trust from the international community."[17] The stated priority of the process is "to build confidence on both halves of the peninsula, while ensuring a virtuous cycle that will improve North-South relations, keep the peace in the region, and lay the foundation for Korean unification."[18] The policy calls for increasing dialogue and exchanges to foster trust and reduce tensions between the two Koreas. President Park has said that she will remain resolute in the face of North Korea's threats and provocations yet simultaneously seek dialogue with the nascent Kim Jong-un regime and even include the DPRK in her initiative at the regional level. She has emphasized a "principled" approach, meaning that Pyongyang must first live up to its end of past agreements, and abide by international norms and standards. Promotion of inter-Korean economic, social and cultural exchanges and cooperation (in particular the large-scale social overhead capital envisioned in the 'Vision Korea Project') depend upon North Korea's efforts to denuclearize and to build trust with Seoul.[19] President Park has also said that the actions of the North Korean leadership will not

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17. Ministry of Unification, "The Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula," September 2013.
18. Ministry of Unification, "The Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula," July 2, 2013.
19. Ministry of Unification, "Policy and Initiatives: Administrative Tasks." Also see Ministry of Unification booklet "Trust Building Process on the Korean Peninsula," September 2013, pp. 17 and 31; "Korean Peninsula Trust Process & Inter-Korean Ties," *Vantage Point*, Vol. 36, No. 10 (October 2013), p 7.

impact South Korea's humanitarian policies toward the ordinary citizens of the DPRK, and has pledged to press for greater people-to-people exchanges between North and South Koreans. Thus mutually reinforcing politico-military confidence building measures combined with social and economic exchange and cooperation can lead to the normalization of South-North relations and the forging of a more enduring peace on the Korean Peninsula. In this way, it is believed that "trust" can begin to be built — although the operative word "trust" has not been defined by the Ministry of Unification or the president herself. This indicates that Seoul sees "trust" as a variable, as a means in which improvement in inter-Korean hinges upon.

To date, Pyongyang has not responded favorably to Seoul's new approach. Apart from verbally rejecting President Park's proposal — referring to it as a "confrontation policy" and "anti-reunification theory"[20] — North Korea officially initiated its own policy of simultaneous construction of its nuclear programs and development of its economy — the "*byungjin* line"[21] — despite President Park's proclamation that "We have to get North Korea to realize that the objective of simultaneously pursuing nuclear armament and economic development is an impossible illusion."[22] The North Korean regime does not emphasize "trust" as a condition of inter-Korean relations but rather 'uriminzokkiri' ('by our nation itself'),[23] as clarified in past inter-Korean declarations of June 2000 and October 2007. For Pyongyang, conditions for inter-Korean relations are the Korean people and Korean

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20. "Another Version of Confrontation Policy," *Pyongyang Times*, May 25, 2013; "Sinister Intent," *Pyongyang Times*, June 1, 2013; "It's Time to Reset Relations," *Pyongyang Times*, June 8, 2013; "Rodong Sinmun Blasts S. Korean Authorities' 'Theory of Adhering to Principle'," KCNA, November 18, 2013.

21. "Our Party Line of Economic Construction and Nuclear Weapons Development Is Permanent," *Rodong Sinmun*, May 3, 2013 (in Korean).

22. Quote in "Park's Northeast Asia Peace & Cooperation Initiative," *Vantage Point*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (June 2013), p. 17.

23. For recent examples in the North Korean media, see "Cornerstone of Korean Reunification," *Pyongyang Times*, June 1, 2013; "Key to Peace and Reunification of Korea," *Pyongyang Times*, August 17, 2013; "Rodong Sinmun Blasts S. Korean Authorities' 'Theory of Adhering to Principle'," KCNA, November 18, 2013.

solidarity. Under the Kim Jong-un regime, North Korea appears to be holding fast to this ideal.[24]

Can trust in any of the three dimensions outlined above be found between the high-ranking authorities of North and South Korea, or between or in their government institutions? The virtual absence of interactions between government officials renders this difficult to measure. Establishing political trust will be crucial to the overall improvement of inter-Korean relations. But at this time it is hard to fathom how the political level offers a viable starting point for the two countries to build trust in any of its dimensions.

Rather, South Korean policy toward North Korea, while being adaptive, should seek to enlarge multidimensional connections.[25] That might best begin by employing a two-track approach to trust building, at the political and societal levels, respectively. In the absence of progress on political-military confidence-building measures, it would seem unlikely that Seoul would expand social exchanges and civic groups' engagement in development assistance with the North. But if trust between the two countries is indeed a process, rather than a variable, built upon various and multiple sources of connectedness, then establishing, nurturing, and sustaining those sources of connect-edness at different levels would be a more prudent strategy. In the limited experience of South Korean NGOs with the DPRK, building interpersonal relationships between people of the North and South was possible, signifying the significant role civic groups could play in building connectedness, and therefore Seoul's current endeavor to build trust between the two Koreas.

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24. As a former high-level North Korean defector points out, Kim Jong-un's 2013 New Year speech called attention to the "65th Anniversary of the Founding of the DPRK" and "60th Anniversary of Victory in the Homeland Liberation War" as national holidays to be highlighted in the year, signaling his refusal of "trust" as the ideal for inter-Korea relations. Jang Jin-sung, "Kim Jong-un's New Year Speech: What It Really Means (Part 2 of 2)," *NK News*, January 3, 2013, www.nknews.org.
25. Keun-sik Kim, "Concept, Evaluation, Task of Engagement Policy: Focusing on the Evolution of Engagement," *Korea and World Politics* (in Korean), Vol. 24, No. 1 (Spring 2008), pp. 1–34.

Building Trust on the Margins: Revitalizing the Role of South Korean NGOs

South Korean NGO Experience with the DPRK

South Korean NGOs have been active in providing humanitarian aid and to some degree development assistance to North Korea since the mid-1990s. Faith-based and privately run charities in South Korea began campaigns to collect donations and organized efforts to provide food aid to the North, a response to the devastating famine that hit the country in the mid-1990s. Their programs and experience since then have been well described elsewhere.[26]

In brief, efforts of South Korean civil society to engage North Korea began earnestly during the years of the Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008) administrations, as both presidents championed a policy of engagement with the DPRK. Multiple channels of contact were allowed and the types of exchanges expanded to include not only food aid but also programs in agriculture to enhance food security (i.e., high-yield corn and seed potato planting, provision of fertilizers, goat milk production, innovative greenhouse usage, etc.), health and medical aid to improve living conditions (i.e., provision of vitamins and medicines, repair and refurbishment of hospitals, training in improving hygiene and various medical treatment, pharmaceutical development, etc.), the environment (i.e., reforestation, land use management), and disaster relief and prevention, among others. During this time, monitoring and reporting of these projects were somewhat relaxed.

This situation changed with the advent of the conservative Lee Myung-bak administration (February 2008–February 2013), who took

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26. Edward P. Reed, "From Charity to Partnership: South Korean NGO Engagement with North Korea," in Sung Chull Kim and David C. Kang, eds., *Engagement with North Korea: A Viable Alternative* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), pp. 199–223; Chung Oknim, "The Role of South Korean NGOs: The Political Context," in L. Gordon Flake and Scott Snyder, *Paved with Good Intentions: The NGO Experience in North Korea* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2003), pp. 81–110.

a different attitude toward cooperation with North Korea, for various reasons,[27] emphasizing the importance of normality in inter-Korean cooperation, which meant that programs and projects be set to achieve their original purposes, including the provision of humanitarian assistance. Hence previous policies regarding engagement and humanitarian assistance, *inter alia*, were reversed, essentially bringing South Korean NGO visits to the North and humanitarian assistance projects such as delivery of food aid and fertilizer to a virtual halt. NGO personnel visits to the North became tightly controlled and curtailed by Seoul. In fact, the total number of visitors to the DPRK for inter-Korean social exchanges plummeted — including in areas that North Korea is highly emphasizing domestically, such as science and technology.[28]

Overall, North Korea's military provocations since 2006 and the subsequent political fallout in inter-Korean relations, the ridged nature of the regime in Pyongyang, and North Korea's economic hardships have meant that social and cultural exchange between South Korean NGO personnel and North Koreans was somewhat difficult to promote.[29] In addition, overall past South Korean NGO engagement

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27. It was determined that in some cases past assistance such as food aid had been used to serve other purposes, such as eliciting inter-Korea dialogues, family reunions, etc. Suk Lee, "ROK Policy on North Korea and Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation: Prospects and Analyses," *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (2012), pp. 16–17. Of course, North Korea's provocative and hostile acts — i.e., North Korea's first nuclear test in October 2006, the shooting death of a South Korean tourist at the Geumgangsan tourist resort area in July 2008, second nuclear test in May 2009, sinking of the navy corvette *ROKS Cheonan* in March 2010, and shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010 — played prominently in the Lee administration's decision to endorse and maintain this policy reversal. In particular, tensions on the Peninsula spiked after North Korea's first nuclear test in October 2006, leading to disputes between progressive and conservative political and social groups in South Korea, and a growing conservative attitude and negative sentiment toward North Korea within South Korean society, including on the issue of humanitarian assistance to the DPRK.
28. For a list of types of and figures on inter-Korean social and cultural exchanges from 1989 to 2010, see MOU website, http://eng.unikorea.go.kr/CmsWeb/viewPage.req?idx=PG0000000534#nohref (retrieved November 16, 2013).
29. EunJeong Soh, "South Korean Civil Society and the Politics of Aid in North Korea," *Journal of Peace and Unification*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Spring 2013), p. 93.

with North Korea, consisting largely of delivery of humanitarian aid, had mixed results; yet it did yield some positive impact, especially in the area of medical assistance. During the years of the Sunshine policy, a number of South Korean NGOs were actively engaged in coopera- tive agricultural projects in conjunction with general humanitarian aid efforts, also making rural agricultural cooperation a core practical means to improve inter-Korean relations. As well, as a third-party actor, while South Korean NGOs lacked the power to play a significant role in readjusting the relationship between the authorities of the North and South, they did serve a complementary role in reducing tensions between the two states, gradually penetrating North Korean society.[30]

One South Korean NGO in particular has been able to establish positive relationships with North Korea by sustaining their programs and steering clear of political entanglements. For sixteen years, the Eugene Bell Foundation (EBF) has provided humanitarian assistance to North Korea, focusing particularly on medical aid to help North Koreans suffering from infectious diseases (i.e., tuberculosis). The foundation has worked to continually provide quality medical supplies, education, equipment, and capacity-building training to its North Korean partners and patients through ongoing programs. It has established and sustained partnerships with North Korean medical facilities, helping them become self-supporting. By 2012, the foundation expanded its treatment centers to eight (North Pyeongan and South Pyeongan Provinces, Nampo City and Pyongyang City), allowing it to care for hundreds of North Korean patients every year. In addition, on visits to deliver assistance and supplies, the visiting foundation members specify the names and intentions of its sponsors.[31]

By continuing communication through periodic visits, listening to local partners, providing quality medical assistance in various forms, and staying committed to their mission and relationship building — despite the 'noise' created by the political fallout from

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30. Chung Oknim, op cit., p. 105.
31. See Eugene Bell Foundation website and *2012 Annual Report*.

North Korea's military provocations and difficulties created because of the rigid nature of the political regime — EBF personnel have been able to develop intimate relationships with North Korean professionals and authorities. In addition, even if the North Korean authorities attempt to take credit for such philanthropy by stating the aid and interactions were made possible thanks to the concern and munificence of the North Korean leader, they cannot entirely prevent a positive image of the foundation itself being built in the minds of the numerous patients the treatment centers have served and professionals EBF has engaged, laying the building blocks for trust building on two dimensions: thin interpersonal trust and institutional trust.

Recommendations

In North Korea today, where the state-society relationship has visibly changed over the last ten years,[32] now would seem apropos to lay more of these building blocks. Prior to the high tensions and bellicose rhetoric following North Korea's third nuclear test in February 2013, the Kim Jong-un leadership had sent out some encouraging signs. In

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32. Research reports suggest the existence of a gap between the official discourse promoted by the ruling regime and the actual life goals of the people; hence, the collective mindset has weakened, a sense of autonomy has proliferated, and ordinary citizen's distrust toward the state is emerging. Kim Soo Am et al., *The Quality of Life of North Korean: Current Status and Understanding* (Seoul: KINU, December 2012). "The Double Lives of Ordinary North Koreans," New Focus International, March 5, 2013. Interestingly, other studies nevertheless argue that the recent economic, cultural, and social changes have not produced a significant effect on the political conscience of North Korean citizens, as pride in the *juche* ideology has been maintained, along with support for the Kim regime, due to the low-level political consciousness of the citizens and effective propaganda of the Kim-family regime. Kim Byeong-ro, "Social Changes in North Korea, 2008–2011: Based on North Korean Refugees Survey" (in Korean), *North Korean Studies Review*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (April 2012), pp. 39–84. While citizen's voluntary loyalty to the regime has said to have weakened considerably, their loyalty is still maintained normatively through their over-socialization. Lee Hyun-joo, "A Change in N.K. Citizen's Loyalty to their Regime after the Experience of an Economic Crisis," *Vantage Point*, Vol. 36, No. 6 (June 2013), pp. 48–57.

the first half of 2012, the young Kim Jong-un seemed to have assumed a leadership style characterized by more openness and relaxation. Economic recovery and social stability appear to be major concerns. Considering the changes in North Korean society and this positive attitude and orientation of the young leader, the ground might be fertile to revitalize the role of South Korean NGOs as aid and assistance providers. Of course, as economists have noted, based on the nature of the regime in Pyongyang and the experience of the international community including South Korea with the DPRK, aid and assistance to the North has to be selective.[33] The incumbent Park Geun-hye administration is maintaining a 'principled' approach to inter-Korean relations. Yet it will be important for Seoul to remain flexible and consider innovative and incentive-laden steps that will convince Pyongyang to constructively engage.

As is stated in the October 2007 inter-Korean joint declaration, among other things both Koreas agreed to resolve the issue of unification on their own initiative and according to the spirit of 'by-the-Korean-people-themselves'; boost exchanges and cooperation in the social areas, including education, science and technology, and sports, *inter alia*; and promote humanitarian cooperation projects. All of these suggest the involvement of both societies and of ordinary citizens. While honoring past agreements on the nuclear issue will be harder to achieve, these elements as outlined in the October 2007 Joint Declaration should provide an easier starting point for both sides to honor past promises.

In one respect, points of contact must be found within the spaces where the North Korean leadership feels less threatened and/or willing to allow for positive people-to-people interaction. While the South Korean government concerns itself with the regime in Pyongyang, South Korean NGOs are still the actors that can reach the ordinary citizens of North Korea more directly. Considering North Korea under

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33. Nicholas Eberstadt, "Western Aid: The Missing Link for North Korea's Economic Revival?" in Kyung-Ae Park and Scott Snyder, eds., *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013), pp. 119–152.

the nascent Kim Jong-un regime, the South Korean NGOs and their experience, and the need for policy innovation, a few recommendations are appropriate.

Humanitarian Aid and the Quality of Life

From its Inter-Korean Cooperation Fund, Seoul recently pledged USD 6.3 million to the United Nations' World Health Organization to be used toward repairing North Korean medical facilities, training health-care workers, and providing essential medicines to those in need. Seoul has also said it will increase the number of South Korean civic groups allowed to provide aid from five (as of July 2013) to twelve so that they can also send various aid to not only the vulnerable but all citizens in need of assistance.[34] This is a good start, especially if more South Koreans are permitted to visit the North to deliver and monitor such aid, and interact with local intermediaries. The number of qualified civic groups should be expanded as they come forward.

Energy Assistance via Renewables

The old saying 'dynamite comes in small packages' speaks of how small gifts can have a large impact. For the NGO reengagement, Seoul could consider supporting small-scale renewable energy projects directed at improving the quality of life for rural populations of the DPRK. There are several reasons for this recommendation. First, North Korea has shown considerable interest in small-scale renewable energy projects — including methane units and solar energy for heating (in houses, schools, clinics, greenhouses, etc.)[35] and wind power for electricity generation in rural areas.[36] Consistent with the

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34. "S. Korea to Give US$6.3 Mln in Humanitarian Aid to N. Korea," *Yonhap*, 2 September 2013.
35. "Renewable Energy in the DPRK," NCNK Newsletter, Vol. 2, No. 1 (January 13, 2009).
36. "DPRK Makes Efforts to Widely Use Wing Energy," KCNA, November 18, 2013.

'self-reliant' style of North Korea's development policy,[37] these projects have been relatively modest in number, and by no means could they solve the country's total energy needs. Their significance lies, however, in that they respect local needs and choices, can have immediate positive impact on their lives their beneficiaries, address the quality of life mandate, and are suitable to the objectives and initiatives of Seoul's Trust-building Process — including the proposed "Green Détente."[38]

Second, North Korea's rural population as a percent of the total populationis considerable,[39] and needs to be included in North Korea's overall modernization process. Development aid can help create the environment to encourage their participation, so long as it involves internationally acceptable infrastructure development that impacts the quality of life of the people directly and immediately. In this regard, targeting rural communities for collaboration with NGOs in small-scale sustainable energy projects provides a doable small step in that process. And as experts have argued, renewable energy cooperation would be consistent with the current direction of the North Korean government's energy policy; allow for the effects of technology transfers to go beyond one-dimensional transfers or one-time energy deliveries; provide a localized alternative to the North's decrepit energy network and infrastructure; support North Korea's interest and development in the direction of renewables; be a more publically acceptable and safer venue to engage the North, and be more likely to avoid the drawbacks related to technology diversion to the military and its nuclear programs.[40] Likewise, renewable energy cooperation in

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37. Virginie Grzelczyk, "Uncovering North Korea's Energy Security Dilemma: Past Policies, Present Choices, Future Opportunities," *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies (CEJISS)*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (January 2012), p. 140.

38. MOU, "Trust-Building Process on the Korean Peninsula," pp. 17, 32.

39. In 2011 it was 39.7%, or more than twice that of South Korea's at 16.8%. See World Bank website, http://search.worldbank.org/data?qterm=Korea%2C+ Dem.+Rep.+rural+population+%25&language=EN&format= (Accessed June 25, 2013).

40. David von Hippel, Scott Bruce, and Peter Hayes, "Transforming the DPRK Through Energy Sector Development," *38 North*, Special Report 11-3, Washington, D.C.: U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS, Johns Hopkins University, March 4, 2011,

the rural areas would also necessitate for people-to-people exchanges — even if somewhat limited at first — and could form the building blocks for a type of sustained engagement through initial capacity building and training of local recipients by providers on how to operate, maintain, and repair the new technological devices. Instillation of such renewables may also be used to later stimulate private sector engagement with the international community, allowing the exchanges to continue, evolve, and possibly expand.[41] Considering South Korea's technology, the most suitable area for cooperation in renewables would be wind and solar power.[42]

The international community, too, largely through international organizations and NGO involvement, has had some success in its engagement with North Korea in introducing renewable energy.[43] Seoul would be wise to support collaboration between South Korean NGOs and internationally-recognized institutions to deliver similar projects. The government should encourage South Korean civil society to seek partnerships with these successful international NGOs for the purpose of using best practices and use these models to expand projects

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www.38north.org; Grzelczyk, op cit., pp. 132–154; Sul-Ki Yi, Haw-Young Sin, and Eunnyeong Heo, "Selecting Sustainable Renewable Energy Source for Energy Assistance to North Korea," *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, Vol. 15, (2011), pp. 554–563.

41. For example, a small-scale company operated by a Korean American man this author met currently works to repair the wind turbines and solar panels in the northern parts of the DPRK.

42. For technical details, see Hwa-Young Sin, Eunnyeong Heo, Sul-Ki Yi, and Jinhyo Kim, "South Korean Citizens' Preferences on Renewable Energy Support and Cooperation Policy for North Korea," *Renewable and Sustainable Energy Reviews*, Vol. 14, (2010), pp. 1383–1384.

43. For World Vision's experience, see "Renewable Energy in the DPRK," NCNK Newsletter, vol. 2, issue 1, January 13, 2009, and "North Korea: The Old People Danced all Night," World Vision International website, October 4, 2011, at www.wvi.org; for details on the Nautilus Institute's experience, see Chris Greacean and Nautilus Team, "Rural Re-electrification in the DPRK," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (Spring 2002), pp. 65–67; for details on the United Nations Development Programme's small wind turbine projects, see Jerome Sauvage, "Small Wind Energy Project Improves Livelihoods in Rural Areas," September 24, 2012, http://kp.one.un.org/energy-in-dprk/.

into other rural regions in North Korea. In this regard, South Korean citizens and Korean diasporas can also be activated.

Capacity Building

Capacity-building has long been noted as a promising area of engage-ment.[44] Capacity building has involved mainly international academic institutions and NGOs, especially in training programs covering finance, international trade, market economy, and taxation, to name a few. While South Korean NGOs involvement has been problematic because of the political dynamics of the inter-Korean relationship, Seoul has sponsored such projects for North Korean officials and academics in the past, with on-site training taking place in China.[45] Seoul would be wise to open up potential for more such engagement in this realm in the future by supporting civic groups' creativity now in planning new projects that can get the attention of North Korea yet still remain within the parameters of acceptance by the South Korean govern-ment and international regulations and norms.

Conclusion

Empowering civil society through its civic groups and NGOs to tackle the goal of trust building with North Korea has its limitations and shortcomings. First, mutual lack of trust also has hindered to some extent the NGO-DPRK relationship,[46] and such engagement cannot

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44. For discussion, see Bernhard Seliger, "North Korea's Economic Development and External Relations — Engagement on the Margins: Capacity Building in North Korea," in *Korea's Economy 2009*, Vol. 25 (Seoul: Korea Economic Institute, 2009), pp. 67–75; Kim Taekyoon, "Possibilities and Prospects for South Korean Engagement with North Korea in Knowledge Sharing/Capacity Building Projects," paper presented at the internation conference on Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing with North Korea: Past Successes and Future Prospects, Seoul, Korea, June 12, 2013.
45. "Seoul Funds Capitalism 101 for Leading N. Koreans," *Chosun Ilbo*, January 8, 2010.

be expected to lead to immediate, fundamental change in the central government in Pyongyang, as NGOs in the past failed to play a transformative role in adjusting relationships between authorities. But the engagement did act as a buffer which helped reduce inter-Korean tensions and gradually penetrated North Korean society, thus "helping to lead its government in the direction of change."[47]

Second, some NGOs may have their own transformative agendas that may be less than acceptable to Pyongyang. But most can be seen as providing goodwill rather than being exploitive. In the initial stage of Seoul's Trust-building Process, the power of their apolitical nature and generosity should not be underestimated but rather utilized to reengage the societies of South and North Korea.

Third, domestic public support in South Korea for such a policy must be considered. South Korean perceptions of North Korea are becoming quite negative: according to a recent survey, only about 4 percent of South Koreans hold a positive view of the DPRK, against 90 percent which hold negative views.[48] Recent survey data suggests the majority of South Koreans (approximately 77%) believe that there is little chance that North Korea will give up its nuclear development plan if the United States and other countries remove economic sanc-

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46. In the words of a former UN representative to the DPRK, "They [the North Koreans] thought that the humanitarian programme was partly the result of genuine international . . . concern for the Korean people and partly politically motivated by the (foreign) governments . . . . On the other side, no major western donor really trusted the North Koreans to implement genuine rural rehabilitation . . . without trying to divert that particular aid to other places for other purposes. As a result . . . the North Koreans were forced to take in a type of aid that they genuinely abhorred from donors that they deeply distrusted." Matthew McGrath, "North Korea's Famine: A UN Representative Looks Back," NKNews.org, April 29, 2013, at www.nknews.org.

47. Chung, "The Role of South Korean NGOs," p. 105. As Chung mentions, during the late 1990s and early 2000s, North Korea was not completely confident in its economic and political systems, and therefore was highly cautious with regard to South Korean NGOs.

48. BBC, "Country Ratings Poll," May 22, 2013, p. 35, www.globescan.com/images/ images/pressreleases /bbc2013_country_ratings/2013_country_rating_poll _bbc_globescan.pdf (accessed August 27, 2013).

tions and guarantee the North's security; 60% also believe North Korea should dismantle its nuclear programs before sanctions are removed or security guarantees given.[49] This would suggest the majority in South Korean society might not initially favor expanding NGO engagement beyond the humanitarian to involve significant support for development assistance or sponsorship of exchanges unless the nuclear issue is resolved. Something will need to be done to drastically reverse these perceptions. Allowing for more civic groups to get involved in inter-Korean exchanges and projects will be important to reverse this trend.

Fourth, the recommendations for NGO engagement suggested here obviously reside at the event level. When we consider the history of inter-Korean relations, changes at the event level cannot be expected to transfer automatically to the situational level (i.e., improved inter-Korean relations) or structural level (i.e., division of the Korean Peninsula or competition between the two systems).[50]

Increased South Korean civil society engagement with North Korea has no guarantees. But engagement between the two societies must move forward if dimensions of trust are to be built. The experience of international aid providers, especially NGOs, also suggests that local North Korean officials tend to be more accommodating than their government intermediaries,[51] suggesting a more suitable space in which interpersonal ties and thin interpersonal trust can begin to be built. Specifically, for inter-Korean relations to improve, Seoul's political efforts to engage the leadership in Pyongyang need to be complimented by parallel efforts to nurture contacts at the societal level,

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49. For the TSN Korea opinion poll on this, see "South Korean Attitudes toward the North Korean Nuclear Program," North Korea: Witness to Transformation, Peterson Institute for International Economics, October 11, 2013.

50. Kihl-jae Ryoo, "Prospects of the Leadership Structure of North Korea in the Post-Kim Jong-il Era," *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (Spring 2010), pp. 34–35.

51. Mark Manyin, "Food Crisis and North Korea's Aid Diplomacy," in Kyung-Ae Park, ed., *New Challenges of North Korean Foreign Policy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 85.

contacts that can help alter North Korean citizens' perceptions of South Koreans and South Korean institutions, and vice versa. That can best start — selectively — at the level of nongovernmental engagement.

As Koo points out, "government policy is a determining factor in the ebb and flow of unification movements in South Korea."[52] As the Park administration pursues its inter-Korean policies, advocating and supporting interaction between ordinary South and North Koreans citizens, regardless of movement on the denuclearization issue, would demonstrate the administration's confidence in own system and the country's identity as a democracy. Ultimately, this is the "risk" Seoul will need to take if the Trust-building Process is to seed, germinate, and flourish. Paradoxically, to begin to build trust, Seoul should loosen the reins on civil contact with the North and emphasize a "people first approach" to build trust in the inter-Korean relationship.

For South Korea's policy toward North Korea, complementary approaches that help address North Korea's humanitarian concerns, fall in line with local needs and the North Korean government's directions with its domestic policies, and promote communication between South and North Koreans can have lasting positive impact, working to slowly change mutual negative perceptions, which is a meaningful way to begin to build mutual trust. Considering the North Korean regime's insecurities yet encouraging direction with some of its own policies (such as on renewable energy), South Korea's humanitarian motivations and the Kim Jong-un leadership's announced mandate to improve the quality of life of the North Korean people, the robust democracy that South Korea is, and the past experiences of the South Korean and international NGOs' engagement with the DPRK, revitalizing South Korean nongovernmental engagement could prove to be a valuable step toward improving the quality of life for North Korea's people and over the long term help develop the multidimensional connectivity needed to foster the interpersonal trust between the peo-

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52. Kab-Woo Koo, "Civil Society and the Unification Movement in South Korea: Issues and Challenges," *Journal of Peace and Unification*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (Spring 2011), p. 112.

ples of the two Koreas that will ultimately be needed to move the trust-building process forward.

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