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HUMANITARIAN AID IN NORTH KOREA: NEEDS, SANCTIONS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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HUMANITARIAN AID IN NORTH KOREA: NEEDS, SANCTIONS AND FUTURE CHALLENGES

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"The [DPRK] is in the midst of a protracted, entrenched humanitarian situation largely forgotten or overlooked by the rest of the world."

United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator Tapan Mishra, 2017¹

"We've been able to navigate it, but every one of those [UN and US] restrictions affects the quality of our work, and our ability to reach more people. That's just the reality. I don't think it's the intention of the people who put the sanctions together, but that's just how it's worked out."

Randall Spadoni, World Vision²

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Cover image: Pyongyang cityscape, September 2016 / Centre for Humanitarian Leadership"

1 Humanitarian Country Team. (2017). *DPR Korea 2017: Needs and Priorities*. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/DPRK%20Needs%20and%20Priorities%202017.pdf>

2 CATO institute. (2019, 11 June). 'Peering Beyond the DMZ: Understanding North Korea behind the Headlines.' Retrieved from: <https://www.cato.org/events/peering-beyond-the-dmz>

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This project sought to answer two core questions:

What is known about the current humanitarian situation in the DPRK?

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) is in the midst of a protracted, long-term situation of humanitarian need rooted in political and economic choices by the North Korean regime. Small-scale climatic emergencies (i.e. floods and typhoons) exacerbate ongoing gaps in food security, water/sanitation, healthcare, nutrition, and disaster risk reduction. It is estimated 10.9 million North Koreans need some form of humanitarian assistance. While there is not currently a situation of immediate crisis, the long-term and systemic nature of humanitarian need means the DPRK is vulnerable to likely future emergency, at an intergenerational level.

How are sanctions affecting the delivery of aid and humanitarian work?

In understanding how the unilateral (especially United States [US]) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions have affected the delivery of aid and impacted humanitarian work, interviews with practitioners and others with intimate knowledge of the humanitarian landscape in the DPRK, triangulated with public statements by humanitarians, have revealed four levels of impact. This includes:

- i. the exemptions process: aspects of actually applying for sanctions or, in the case of US citizens, travel exemption
- ii. dealings with third parties: business with entities like banks and suppliers
- iii. interactions with sanctioning and/or implementing governments: relationships and exchanges involving humanitarian organisations and government entities outside the DPRK, and
- iv. opportunities for humanitarian collaboration with North Korean counterparts: actual and perceived capacity to work with North Korean interlocutors.

In seeking to alleviate the impact of sanctions on the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the North Korean civilian population, set out below are key recommendations drawn from this research:

1. The UNSC, namely the 1718 Sanctions Committee, should continuously monitor and engage with humanitarian agencies to understand, and systematically capture, sanctions' impact on aid efforts
2. The DPRK government should allow access to humanitarian and UN agencies, including resident and non-resident groups
3. The US government should redesign the exemption and travel ban process to reduce waiting times and administrative burden
4. All governments should not allow political considerations to interfere with the exemptions approval and implementation process
5. Secondary sanctions causing low-risk appetite to banks and suppliers should be addressed through a recognised banking channel
6. Donors should fund humanitarian programmes in the DPRK to ensure gains, such as in prevalence of childhood malnutrition, that have been made over the last two decades are not lost
7. The humanitarian community should closely monitor levels of need from available documentation and insights from other organisations operating inside the country
8. Humanitarian agencies should invest in evidence-based advocacy to demonstrate impact levels of sanctions on delivery of humanitarian aid.

INTRODUCTION

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, also known as North Korea) is well-known in the media and amongst policymakers in relation to its cult of personality surrounding the Kim family, egregious abuses of human rights, and its nuclear weapons programme. While illegal and semi-legal markets, as well as the spread of outside (particularly South Korean) media, have affected the internal day-to-day lives of North Koreans, the regime continues to assert its influence over nearly all aspects of life. The DPRK made its first large-scale appeal for international humanitarian aid in 1995. The 1995 appeal was in response to a widespread famine, also known as the Arduous March, that killed an estimated 600,000 to one million North Koreans.³ The famine had ended by the new millennium, but food security has continued to elude the DPRK, bringing the country into a situation of protracted humanitarian need. The DPRK has also struggled with providing adequate nutrition, healthcare, disaster prevention and recovery, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) for its people. As of 2019, 10.9 million North Koreans out of a population of 25 million are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance.⁴

The limited international humanitarian community in the DPRK includes non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international organisations (IOs), and bilateral organisations. Independent North Korean civil society is non-existent. Humanitarian organisations work with various national and local government-affiliated entities to deliver their programmes. South Korean NGOs require approval from the South Korean government to deliver aid activities in the DPRK, which has varied depending on the political climate. In recent years, the rest of the international humanitarian community has also been subject to restrictions in the form of unilateral and UNSC sanctions. Americans must also apply for US government permission for DPRK travel.

Historically, humanitarian access has been a challenge, leading several NGOs such as Action contre la Faim, CARE, and Médecins du Monde, to withdraw from the country in the 1990s and 2000s. While restrictions remain, access has generally improved, with UN agencies in 2018 having some degree of access to all 11 North Korean provinces.⁵ UN agencies have gained access to markets⁶ and NGOs are able to work directly with institutions such as hospitals.⁷ Data from and about the DPRK can be incomplete, sporadic, and/or lack transparency. However, humanitarian agencies have forged partnerships with the DPRK authorities that have allowed for the collection and dissemination of data on areas including food production, health, nutrition, lifestyle, etc. This data has helped to provide a brief overview of what is believed to be known about the current humanitarian situation in DPRK.

3 Goodkind, D., & West, L. (2001). The North Korean Famine and its Demographic Impact. *Population and Development Review*, 27(2), 219–238

4 Humanitarian Country Team [HCT]. (2019). *DPR Korea 2019: Needs and Priorities*, p. 5. Retrieved from: <https://dprkorea.un.org/en/10164-dpr-korea-needs-and-priorities-2019>

5 Statement by Mr. Tapan Mishra, UN Resident Coordinator in DPRK, on the release of the 2019 Needs and Priorities Plan. (2019, 6 March). *ReliefWeb*. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-peoples-republic-korea/statement-mr-tapan-mishra-un-resident-coordinator-dprk>

6 *FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*. (2011). Rome

7 Interview with Roald Foreland, Evangelisk Orientkisjon (EOM)

HUMANITARIAN NEED IN THE DPRK

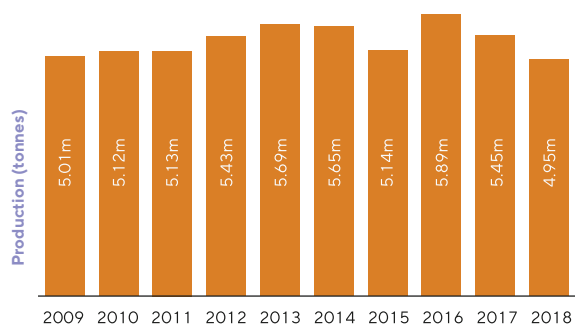
The identified areas of key humanitarian need include food security; nutrition; healthcare; disaster risk reduction (DRR); and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). A lack of hard currency to purchase imports, lack of sufficient domestic production capacity, and natural hazards are key contributing factors exacerbating the humanitarian need in the DPRK, driven by the regime's economic and political decisions. This following section provides further context to the humanitarian needs of North Koreans.

Food Security

Forty percent of North Koreans, 10.1 million people, are believed to be food insecure.⁸ Limited arable land and structural barriers to increased food production – including a lack of mechanisation, equipment, and policies that do not adequately address incentive – are compounded by the impact of natural hazards to result in restricted agricultural capacity. The UN reports that while the state-run ration mechanism, the Public Distribution System (PDS), distributes rations, allotments rarely meet target levels⁹ and that dependency on the PDS raises vulnerability.¹⁰ Increased marketisation, as well as small kitchen plots, has created alternate avenues for obtaining food and other items outside the official state channels. Domestic crop production typically falls short by approximately one million tonnes, and 2018 crop production was reported to be at a ten year low at 4.95 million tonnes (see Figure 1).¹¹ The extent to which these deficits are covered by markets, kitchen plots, and other coping mechanisms remains unclear.

Figure 1: DPR Korea Crop Production (2009 – 2018)

Data source: Humanitarian Country Team 2019, p.5



8 FAO and WFP. (2019). *Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK): FAO/WFP Joint Rapid Food Security Assessment*. Bangkok. Retrieved from: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca4447en/ca4447en.pdf>.

9 *Strategic Framework for Cooperation Between the United Nations and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 2017-2021*. (2017). Pyongyang: United Nations DPRK. Retrieved from http://kp.one.un.org/content/dam/unct/dprk/docs/DPRK_UN_Strategic_Framework_2017-2021_-_FINAL.pdf, p. 16

10 *Special Report: FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*. (2013). Retrieved from: <http://www.fao.org/3/al994e/al994e00.pdf>.

11 HCT. (2019). op. cit. p. 5

Nutrition

Undernutrition is an issue for the general population of the DPRK – in 2015–17, 43.4% of the population was estimated to be undernourished.¹² Dietary diversity is low, with protein consumption a particular concern.¹³ UN agencies focus on pregnant and lactating women, as well as children under five. The 2017 Strategic Framework for Co-operation between the UN and the DPRK explained that the situation for these two vulnerable groups 'can best be described as precarious, and a long-term development challenge.'¹⁴ Approximately 1 in 5 North Korean children under the age of 5 are stunted.¹⁵ However, this is an improvement from previous years – a 1998 survey found 62.3% of children under seven were stunted.¹⁶ North Koreans who grew up in the famine era are now in their twenties and thirties, having children of their own, opening up the potential for long-term effects of stunting to begin manifesting at an inter-generational level.

Healthcare

The UN estimates that approximately 9 million North Koreans have limited access to good quality health services.¹⁷ Healthcare facilities suffer from a lack of supplies, medicines, and access to water and electricity. Non-communicable diseases, including cancer and cardiovascular diseases, are a significant burden and are expected to grow.¹⁸ Health-related items that have been delayed due to the sanctions exemptions process include reproductive health kits, heaters for immunisation clinics, ambulance parts, refrigerators, wheelchairs, crutches, walking sticks and walkers, glasses, and hearing aids.¹⁹

12 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO. (2018). *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2018: Building climate resilience for food security and nutrition*. Rome: FAO

13 FAO and WFP. (2019). op. cit.

14 *Strategic Framework for Cooperation Between the United Nations and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 2017-2021*. (2017). op. cit.

15 UNICEF DPRK. (2018). *2017 DPR Korea MICS*. Pyongyang: UNICEF DPRK

16 European Union, UNICEF, WFP, and Government of DPRK. (1998). *Nutrition Survey of Democratic People's Republic of Korea*. p. 6

17 HCT. (2019). op. cit., p. 7

18 Ha, S., & Lee, Y. H. (2019). Underestimated Burden: Non-Communicable Diseases in North Korea. *Yonsei Medical Journal*, 60(5), 481–483.

19 United Nations Panel of Experts. (2019, March). *Report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1874 (2009)*. Retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/S/2019/171>

Tuberculosis (TB) has been a major area of concern and engagement with the international humanitarian community. The DPRK's TB incidence rate is one of the highest in the world, at 513 per 100,000 population in 2017.²⁰ The threat of multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB is also high. Only 1,732 patients started treatment in 2017 out of an estimated 5,200 cases.²¹ The Global Fund pulled out of the DPRK in 2018, causing concern that TB and MDR TB medicine stocks would run out in 2020 and 2019 respectively.²² The Global Fund approved a US \$41.7 million grant in September 2019, claiming its concerns about access were addressed. Experts have alleged that the withdrawal was in fact the result of pressure from the US government.²³

WASH

Nearly 10 million North Koreans lack adequate access to safe drinking water, and approximately 4 million people are unable to access basic sanitation facilities.²⁴ Rural and urban populations can have significant differences in access to WASH facilities. For example, 71.3% of the urban population is estimated to have access to safely managed drinking water. For rural North Koreans, this figure drops to 44.5%.²⁵ Official data from the last census in 2008 indicates that 39.4% of the population lived in rural settings,²⁶ though other estimates suggest this figure may be higher.²⁷ Adequate WASH resources are key for preventing and successfully treating diseases, including diarrhoea, though cholera is not a known problem.

Resilience/Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

The International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) claims six million North Koreans were affected by disasters including drought, flooding, landslides, and typhoons between 2004 and 2016.²⁸ These disasters can

affect populations through displacement, such as in 2016 with Typhoon Lionrock, but also through impacting food security and agriculture conditions. Climate change, deforestation, soil degradation, erosion, and baseline vulnerability to natural disasters, including droughts, floods, and typhoons, compound to result in a high need for strong DRR measures.²⁹

Funding

Funding for humanitarian activity in the DPRK is a consistent challenge. Figure 2 shows humanitarian funding as reported to the Financial Tracking Service (FTS). Figure 3 shows the percentage of required funds met and unmet over the last five years.

Figure 2: Humanitarian Funding to the DPRK
Data source: UN Financial Tracking Service (FTS)

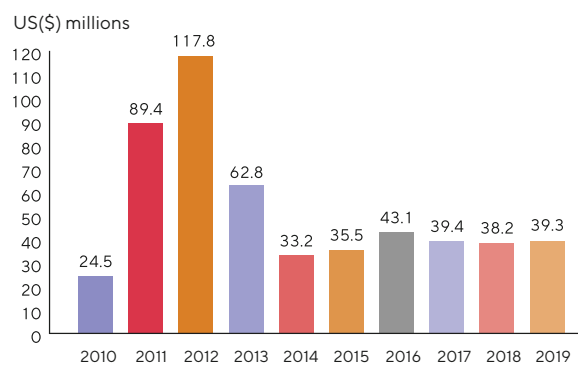
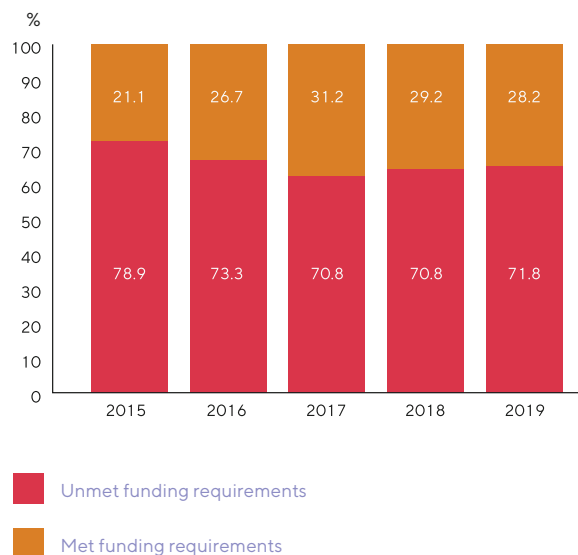


Figure 3: Needs and Priorities Funds
Data source: UN FTS



20 World Health Organisation. (2018). *Global Tuberculosis Report 2018*. Retrieved from https://www.who.int/tb/publications/global_report/en/.

21 World Health Organisation. (2019). *Democratic People's Republic of Korea: Tuberculosis Profile*. Retrieved from: https://extranet.who.int/sree/Reports?op=Replet&name=WHO_HQ_Reports/G2/PROD/EXT/TBCountryProfile&ISO2=KP&outtype=html

22 Talmadge, E., & Kim, T.-H. (2018, November 16). Experts Fear a Tuberculosis Epidemic in North Korea Amid a Crucial Medication Shortage. *Time*. Retrieved from <http://time.com/5456792/north-korea-tuberculosis-epidemic/>

23 O'Carroll, C. (2018, October 12). U.S. NGOs being blocked from humanitarian work in N. Korea, sources say. *NK News*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nknews.org/2018/10/u-s-ngos-being-blocked-from-humanitarian-work-in-n-korea-sources-say/>

24 HCT. (2019). op. cit. p. 3.

25 UNICEF DPRK. (2018). op. cit. p. 149

26 Central Bureau of Statistics. (2009). *DPR Korea 2008 Population Census: National Report*. Retrieved from: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/sources/census/wphc/North_Korea/Final%20national%20census%20report.pdf

27 Em, P. P. (2018). Urbanization in North Korea: An Outline of Its Peculiarities and an Estimation of Its Real Rate. *North Korean Review*, 14(2), 26–45.

28 Froberg, M. (2018). Cultivating hope in DPR Korea. *International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies*. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-peoples-republic-korea/cultivating-hope-dpr-korea>

29 *Strategic Framework for Cooperation Between the United Nations and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, 2017–2021*. (2017). op. cit.

SANCTIONS IN THE DPRK

Since the DPRK's first nuclear test in 2006, the UNSC has passed resolutions denouncing the North Korean nuclear programme and sanctioning various aspects of the economy. In 2017, UNSCR 2397 established humanitarian exemptions.³⁰ NGOs can submit exemption requests to the 1718 Sanctions Committee through UN Member States, the UN Resident Coordinator, or the Committee Secretary, in preferential order, while UN agencies and the Red Cross can submit requests directly. Unilateral sanctions, particularly from the US, have also had a notable impact on the humanitarian sector. Humanitarians may need to navigate the Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC), part of the US Treasury, and Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), part of US Department of Commerce, licences, as well as restrictions on travel. Since 2017, American citizens must apply for one-time use special validation passports (SVPs) to visit the DPRK. Sanctions against the DPRK are not new, but their impact on humanitarian aid has grown considerably since 2017.

Interviews conducted with eleven humanitarian practitioners and others with intimate knowledge of the humanitarian landscape in the DPRK, coupled with public statements by humanitarians in media, revealed the following four levels of impact:

- i. the exemptions process,
- ii. dealings with third-parties,
- iii. interactions with sanctioning and/or implementing governments, and
- iv. opportunities for humanitarian collaboration with North Korean counterparts.

The information provide further detail as to issues encountered within these four key areas.

Exemptions process: aspects of actually applying for sanctions or, in the case of US citizens, travel exemption

Activity/Issue

1. UNSC sanctions

- Some confusion at beginning of sanctions, but more precedent and understanding now.

2. US sanctions/travel ban

- Pre-2017: US NGOs did not need permission if activities under Treasury guidelines, now all activities outside strictly food or medicine need OFAC/BIS clearance

³⁰ 'decides that the Committee may, on a case-by-case basis, exempt any activity from the measures imposed by these resolutions if the committee determines that such an exemption is necessary to facilitate the work of such organisations in the DPRK or for any other purpose consistent with the objectives of these resolutions' (para. 25)

- OFAC says no partnerships with government, but unclear what this means – all NGOs must work with government bodies of some capacity.

3. Increased resources

- Time spent on applications, time spent waiting for applications to process (compounded when multiple exemptions are needed, i.e. OFAC and UNSC), financial resources (i.e. on lawyers), human resources.

Impact

1. Inflexibility

- Lead time for applications approval reduces ability to flexibly respond to North Korean humanitarian needs.

2. Increased resources

- Compounded processes (i.e. SVPs, OFAC/BIS, UNSC) requiring large amounts of time and resources, that small NGOs have not always been able to successfully absorb.

3. Denials

- Groups have been denied at various parts of the process, jeopardising their ability to provide aid.

Examples

- The Australian exemption system flagged the name of North Korean contact as on sanctions list, but it was just a case of similar names. The Australian applying for the exemption was able to get scan of the North Korean's passport to prove they were not the sanctioned person, but noted that obtaining this kind of information may not always be possible.
- An NGO worker found UN bureaucracy to be really difficult and unclear. Their organisation hired an expert attorney. The NGO worker said while the attorney fees were an extra cost, it was money well spent.
- An American NGO's application for SVPs was denied after four successful applications. Other NGOs were denied around the same time. There is no appeal process. The NGO applied again about six months later and was successful. A staffer explained that while they changed their letter of request in the later application, it was probably more a policy-related decision.

Third parties: business with entities like banks and suppliers

Activity/Issue

1. Banking

- US secondary sanctions (sanctions targeting entities and activities outside the jurisdiction of the sanctioning body) create a low-level of risk appetite
- Banking and financial transactions are challenged even when activities are properly exempted and wholly legal

- Issue of blocked transfers, and of humanitarians being forced to carry large amounts of cash into the country.
- 2. Suppliers**
- Like banks, low-level of risk means unwilling to provide products that will end up in DPRK, even with proper exemptions
 - Those willing to work with humanitarians may raise fees.

Impact

1. Burden beyond exemptions

- Banking and sourcing supplies for humanitarian work has become increasingly difficult, placing a further burden on humanitarian agencies even when their work is properly exempted and legal.

2. Withdrawals

- Multiple NGOs have withdrawn due to challenges with banks and/or suppliers.

Examples

- Robert Grund, a European national, was unable to reimburse a non-North Korean national who travelled in Europe to meet a visiting DPRK delegation, because Grund's personal bank began blocking his transfers due to his involvement with the DPRK
- Fida, a Finnish NGO, withdrew from the DPRK in June 2019 after nearly two decades in the country. An official statement said the withdrawal was due to sanctions impact on the banking sector, which made 'financial services related to North Korean projects impossible'.³¹
- Norwegian NGO Evangelisk Orientmisjon's (EOM)'s bank transfer to purchase greenhouses to take to the DPRK was frozen by the bank. The money was eventually returned, but CEO Roald Føreland explained that it was a scary experience to have donor money in limbo.

Interactions with sanctioning and/or implementing governments: relationships and exchanges involving humanitarian organisations and government entities outside the DPRK

Activity/Issue

1. Customs

- Wide array of items held up in customs, often metal
- Even with proper exemptions, can be difficult to clear Chinese customs, despite border being porous for illegal transactions.

2. Political decision-making

- UNSC exemptions held up in late 2018, with only 2 passed from October – December
- Change in January 2019, with ten UNSC exemptions approved that month alone and more SVPs issued after denials in 2018

31 'Finnish NGO quits operations in North Korea amid sanctions.' (2019, June 13). *Yonhap News Agency*. Seoul. Retrieved from: https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2019/06/13/Finnish-NGO-quits-operations-in-North-Korea-amid-sanctions/8061560417502/

- US believed to have stalled permissions humanitarian work as part of 'maximum pressure' campaign.³²

3. Advocacy

- Advocacy aimed at change in DPRK behaviour or raising awareness of human rights abuses taboo for humanitarians, but growing importance of advocacy to home or other sanctioning governments.

Impact

1. Burden beyond exemptions, part 2

- Potential of issues with Chinese customs creates another layer of burden and uncertainty for humanitarians, despite proper exemptions.

2. Opportunities to speak out

- New avenues for humanitarians to engage with the media, the public, and sanctioning governments about their work, but also to communicate and collaborate amongst themselves for greater knowledge sharing and understanding
- Humanitarian access still largely dependent on North Korean permission, but now unilateral and/or multilateral exemptions are also needed, creating a scenario familiar to South Korean NGOs.

3. Case of US policy behaviour

- Case of US in late 2018 showed how politics can prevent humanitarian aid from reaching North Korean people.

Examples

- An Australian interviewee explained that they observed the value of American NGOs advocating together, and this inspired her to advocate for her organisation more actively
- One American interviewee said that SVPs were at one point threatened with being totally shut down, but NGO advocacy prevented this from happening.
- A shipment of hygiene kits containing nail clippers was stuck in China for a fortnight, until Chinese customs allowed the shipment to proceed to the DPRK³³
- One interviewee reported Chinese customs officials questioning UNSC exemptions paperwork.

Opportunities for collaboration with North Korean counterparts: actual and perceived capacity to work with North Korean interlocutors

Activity/Issue

1. Projects

- Challenges to sectors and projects requiring parts and machinery
- Even items outside sanctions and simple items were reported to be difficult to move, like medicine and seeds

32 'US to ease limits on humanitarian aid to North Korea.' (2019, January 11). *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved from: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/11/us-to-ease-limits-on-humanitarian-aid-to-north-korea/>

33 Pennington, M. (2018, January 28). "Charities see nail clippers, shovels are North Korean no-nos." *AP News*. Retrieved from: <https://www.apnews.com/e07f1c16da654bcca9934aa458fa0d0e>

- Long-term knowledge transfer projects potentially violate ban on overseas North Korean workers if participants receive stipend or salary, but short-term study tours still able to continue.
- 2. Access and monitoring**
 - With low levels of funding, humanitarians unable to harness potentials for increased access
 - 3. Relationships**
 - Long period of trust-building threatened to be eroded by inconsistency and unpredictability of sanctions.

Impact

1. Project types

- Projects in a range of sectors have sought and gained exemptions, but potentially greater burden for some (i.e. WASH or other areas requiring machinery and/or metal parts).

2. Blockage to expand humanitarian programmes and understanding

- Lower humanitarian presence brings less capacity to negotiate for access and less on-the-ground knowledge
- Burden of maintaining positive relationships with forward planning and flexibility to respond to need, while under rigidity of sanctions regime.

3. Discouraging new engagement

- Reports of organisations deterred from working in the country (or even with North Koreans on study tours outside the country).

Examples

- One interviewee who worked in the health sector said other groups were interested in engaging with the DPRK, but back away when they saw how much work is required to ensure compliance
- An American interviewee said North Koreans seem to believe sanctions prove what they've always thought about the US government – that the government is bad and that it hates them. He explained that NGOs are trying to combat enemy images, but sanctions are reinforcing them
- 'It takes a very long time to build trust in North Korea. It takes a very long time to build pathways of meaningful engagement where you can actually have effective programming. To dismantle that or allow that to be dismantled by extreme sanctions or whatever keeps people from doing their work, is really a dangerous thing. Because the outside world needs to be able to help if something more catastrophic were to happen there, and you don't just rebuild those things overnight.' – Heidi Linton, Christian Friends of Korea.³⁴

34 CATO institute. (2019, 11 June). 'Peering Beyond the DMZ: Understanding North Korea behind the Headlines.' Retrieved from: <https://www.cato.org/events/peering-beyond-the-dmz>

SUMMARY

Amongst the backdrop of nuclear tests and political fluctuations, humanitarians are facing greater challenges in responding to known needs – and perhaps in learning about prior unknown needs, such as the health concerns around potential escalating HIV threats³⁵ – due to sanctions. While humanitarian exemptions are present in sanctions legislation, aid organisations face obstacles to delivering timely and effective aid. Sustainable, effective programmes to respond to humanitarian need are being challenged by bureaucratic processes and politics.

The humanitarian context appears not to be an ‘emergency’ in the traditional sense, but rather a continuing, structural, protracted situation of widespread, chronic need. As long as sanctions are in place, the international community must consider the realities of the restrictions and their impact on humanitarian aid delivery to the North Korean people.

A clear understanding of humanitarian work, including the interconnected nature of sectors of intervention and the importance of holistic responses (i.e. adequate water and sanitation, proper nutrition, pharmaceuticals, and medical care are all required to effectively tackle tuberculosis) is needed for all stakeholders to ensure that legitimate humanitarian efforts are not hampered, and humanitarian needs of the North Korean people are met.

To support this, it is important to understand where trends in humanitarian needs intersect with trends in the operating environment of aid actors. For instance, the compounding nature of exemptions – an American NGO may need to obtain multiple US government and UN permissions – challenges the ability of humanitarian aid to be responsive, agile and timely.

35 For information on sanctions and anti-retroviral drugs, see Stone, R. (2019). Exclusive: North Korea claimed to be free of HIV. But infections appear to be surging. *Science*. Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/06/exclusive-north-korea-claimed-be-free-hiv-infections-appear-be-surging>

HUMANITARIAN FORESIGHT: WHAT NOW, WHAT NEXT?

The chronic and systemic nature of humanitarian need means the DPRK is vulnerable to future emergency. For instance, areas of long-term need, such as under-nutrition, have the potential to evolve into greater inter-generational human development issues.

The situation is precarious and could at worst tip into large-scale emergency, and at best continue as protracted need with potentially severe manifestations in future generations. Humanitarian foresight analysis can help anticipate, prepare for and better respond to, likely eventualities of the future operating environment. While it is not meant to give a perfect snapshot of the future, it provides a picture of some of the likely evolutions of a situation or crisis. This picture considers the setting in which the crisis takes place (the conditions), as well as the interplay between aid interventions and the context (the system), to support decision-making in the mid to longer term.

Humanitarian practitioners experience many challenges in their efforts to reach North Koreans in need, including limited funding, bureaucratic delays in applying for sanctions exemptions, further delays in procurement of materials,³⁶ as well as continued challenges navigating the constrained environment in the DPRK. A recent example is the experience of Love North Korea Ministries (LNKM), an American NGO attempting to implement a clean drinking water project. LNKM's April 2019 UN exemption was extended for an additional six months in December 2019, 'due to unexpected delays associated with the import of materials.'³⁷ The delay was due to LNKM's OFAC license not being processed within the six-month window of its UN exemption.³⁸

This particular example highlights the bureaucratic and lengthy exemptions processes for humanitarian agencies, with 'the multiple layers involved in carrying out shipments and purchases for aid work in North Korea, and that regardless of any UN exemptions, governments and companies along the way are in some cases still choosing not to approve or associate with such transactions.'³⁹ LNKM's extension was not the only

one granted by the UN in December 2019 – UNICEF also received additional time for its April 2019 exemption 'due to unanticipated difficulties associated with procurement and operational arrangements'.⁴⁰

What will sustain international sanctions against the DPRK in the future, and how are these likely to evolve?

A sanctions-dominated world

The UNSC has enacted 30 sanctions regimes since 1996,⁴¹ with 14 ongoing sanctions regimes currently targeting conflict, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation.⁴² Sanctions measures come in a wide range of forms, from comprehensive measures covering economic and trade to more specific sanctions such as arms embargoes, commodity restrictions and travel bans. Academic literature has argued that sanctions can negatively impact human rights,^{43,44} that targeted sanctions are not a more 'humane' alternative to comprehensive sanctions,⁴⁵ and that sanctions with significant economic impact on their target can be detrimental to public health.⁴⁶ Scholarly work specific to sanctions against North Korea has argued that sanctions may 'have done more harm than good by further worsening the dire living conditions of ordinary citizens'⁴⁷ and that sanctions increase regional inequality within the country.⁴⁸ A report from activist group Korea Peace Now estimates 4,000 North Koreans died preventable deaths due to sanctions and lack of funding for humanitarian programmes.⁴⁹

40 Heusgen, C. (2019, 4 December). op. cit.

41 United Nations Security Council. 'Sanctions.' Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/information>

42 Ibid.

43 Wood, R. M. (2008). "A Hand upon the Throat of the Nation": Economic Sanctions and State Repression, 1976–2001. *International Studies Quarterly*, 52(3), 489–513.

44 Peksen, D. (2009). Better or Worse? The Effect of Economic Sanctions on Human Rights. *Journal of Peace Research*, 46(1), 59–77

45 Heine-Ellison, S. (2001). Impact and Effectiveness of Multilateral Economic Sanctions: A Comparative Study. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 5(1), 81–112.

46 Allen, S. H., and Lektzian, D. J. (2013). Economic sanctions: A blunt instrument? *Journal of Peace Research*, 50(1), 121–135

47 Peksen, D. (2016). *Authoritarian Regimes and Economic Sanction Effectiveness*. Korea Economic Institute of America, Academic Paper Series – On Korea, p. 1. Retrieved from: <http://www.keia.org/publication/authoritarian-regimes-and-economic-sanction-effectiveness-case-north-korea>

48 Lee, Y. S. (2018). International isolation and regional inequality: Evidence from sanctions on North Korea. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 103(November 2017), 34–51

49 Korea Peace Now. (2019). *The Human Costs and Gendered Impact of Sanctions on North Korea*. p. 21–22. Retrieved from: https://koreapeacenow.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/human-costs-and-gendered-impact-of-sanctions-on-north-korea.pdf?mod=article_inline

36 Heusgen, C. (2019, 4 December). Letter to Mr. Omar Abdi, Deputy Executive Director, Programmes, UNICEF. United Nations: New York. Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org/securitycouncil/files/unicef_exemption_request_amendment_4dec19_english.pdf

37 Heusgen, C. (2019, 18 December). Letter to Mr. Gabe Segoine, President LNKM, Inc. United Nations: New York. Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org/securitycouncil/files/1718_to_lnkml_reply_exemption_request_amendment.pdf

38 Zwirko, C. (2019, 23 December). UN extends NGO's North Korea sanctions exemption after slow US approval. *NK Pro*. Retrieved from: <https://www.nknews.org/pro/un-extends-ngos-north-korea-sanctions-exemption-after-slow-u-s-approval/>

39 Ibid.

The US is a vocal supporter of sanctions, both inside the UNSC and unilaterally. According to lists of sanctions programmes published by the US Treasury and State, there are currently 20 country-based or country-related sanctions programmes applied by the US, including both primary sanctions as well as secondary sanctions, which are designed to prevent non-US entities from doing business with sanctions targets even when they are outside American jurisdiction. Former member of the UN Panel of Experts (PoE) Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt posits that, ‘in 2019, after three years of “maximum pressure” – which includes unilateral US as well as UN sanctions – there are few signs of macroeconomic distress in the DPRK.’⁵⁰

In considering these complexities, the key sustaining factors for the application of sanctions include:

The DPRK approaches to political and nuclear issues

This includes nuclear tests, fissile material production, and stalled denuclearisation talks. Related programmes include the DPRK’s missile and satellite programmes, such as launches and tests, inclusive of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). The DPRK conducted nuclear tests in 2006, 2009, 2013, 2016 (two tests) and 2017. Missile tests are more frequent, with twenty in 2019 alone.⁵¹ The nuclear programme is a core part of the DPRK’s security strategy. If political tensions remain unsolved, it is likely we will see a continuation of the nuclear programme, with additional test(s) – be it nuclear and/or missile – over the next few years. The goal of the application of sanctions is to impact the nuclear programme, and much of the international community would like to see diplomatic activity resulting in the beginning processes of nuclear freeze and dismantling of the programme before this time. However, given political uncertainty and past attempts at denuclearisation, this also has the potential to unravel even if negotiations to begin the process are successful.

The DPRK regime’s political decision-making also continues to drive the application of sanctions. The DPRK and the international community have fundamental differences in viewpoints which makes a resolution to the issue challenging, such as the DPRK’s idea of denuclearisation, including removal of US troops from the Republic of Korea (ROK).⁵² Another example is the issue of steps to denuclearisation in exchange for sanctions relief, or sanctions relief in exchange for steps to denuclearisation. (In other words, who moves first?)

50 Kleine-Ahlbrandt, S. (2019, October 7). Maximum pressure against North Korea, RIP. 38 North. Retrieved from: <https://www.38north.org/2019/10/skleineahlbrandt100719/>

51 Center for Strategic & International Studies. (2019). ‘North Korean Missile Launches & Nuclear Tests: 1984–Present.’ Retrieved from: <https://missilethreat.csis.org/north-korea-missile-launches-1984-present/>

52 ‘It Would Be Better to Search for New Way Rather than Facing Barrier on Old Way’ (2018, 20 December). KCNA. Retrieved from: <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/297579/it-would-be-better-to-search-for-new-way-rather-than-facing-barrier-on-old-way/?t=1576673437020>

The role of the US and the application of sanctions, including secondary sanctions

A key player in the DPRK situation, and sustaining factor for the sanctions, the US has consistently played a major role in the Korean peninsula. Kim Jong Un met Donald Trump three times across 2018 and 2019, the first time for a sitting US President to meet the North Korean leader. However, these meetings have had little substantive impact and Trump continues to have a bizarre relationship with Kim.

While political uncertainty with the role of the US – as to which direction and for how long sanctions exemptions will continue in their current form remains unclear – it is clear that despite the instabilities of the current US administration, the current stalemate will likely continue, and sanctions will continue tightening with each step of the North Korean nuclear/missile programme. Leading up to the 2020 US elections, Trump will likely continue to have a generally positive relationship with Kim, which he may attempt to leverage into an agreement or deal for the purposes of boosting his re-election campaign. If Trump is not re-elected a new President with less willingness to engage with the DPRK may drive further deterioration in the situation. If Trump is re-elected, his future efforts to engage the DPRK may continue not to bear fruit.

Cohesion among UNSC members for multilateral sanctions

Sanctions as a response to North Korean nuclear and/or missile testing is likely to continue and tighten further with additional tests. Yet Kleine-Ahlbrandt assesses that the UN PoE continue to report on ‘the failure of countries to commit the time, resources and political will’ to implement the sanctions that require ‘constant support and tightening to sustain pressure, close loopholes and address rapidly changing evasion practices’.⁵³ Despite this requirement, the possibility of achieving political consensus at the Security Council for improvements in sanctions measures will likely continue to erode. China and Russia have submitted a proposal to the UNSC to ease sanctions and resume the six-party talks, with Russia’s ambassador to the UN citing the ‘humanitarian issue’ as the reason for the proposal.⁵⁴ China’s track record on North Korean human rights, which includes repatriating North Korean escapees, does not suggest concern for the humanitarian and human rights situation of the North Korean people. However, the proposal does illustrate the tension amongst the permanent members of the UNSC. This will be an area for humanitarians to watch for developments.

Compliance and Capacity Skills International (CCSI) is a partnership of UN sanctions practitioners working to foster global engagement and address the need for

53 Kleine-Ahlbrandt, S. (2019, October 7). op. cit

54 Zhen, L. (2019, December 17). ‘China urges UN Security Council to back plans to ease North Korean sanctions.’ *South China Morning Post*. Retrieved from: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3042506/china-urges-un-security-council-back-plans-ease-north-korean>

a stronger multilateral, organisational structure. CCSI highlight that one of the key challenging aspects of the current sanctions regimes across the world, among other pertinent issues, is the impact of the UN sanctions system on humanitarian assistance.⁵⁵ Since early 2018, the CCSI has been progressing a project to develop a best practice guidance for Chairs and Members of the United Nations Sanctions Committees, to provide guidelines that help UN Security Council Members create sanctions regimes that are well adjusted, and more coordinated, with a minimized impact on civilians and principled humanitarian action.⁵⁶

What key drivers are likely to exacerbate the needs of already vulnerable populations?

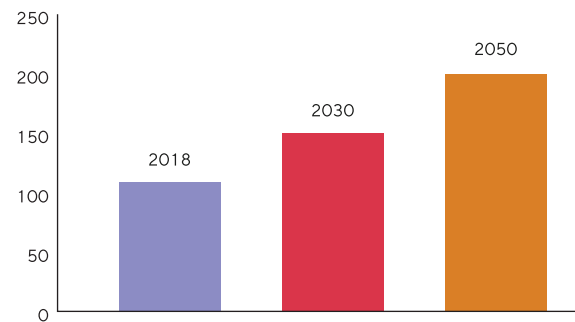
It will be important for humanitarian practitioners to closely monitor how the situation evolves, not just for the immediate effects on need and aid delivery but also in regards to key drivers that may exacerbate need. This section includes drivers identified through analysis of DPRK-specific data from humanitarian agencies, practitioner interviews, political factors, and global humanitarian trends. The following analysis also considers the likely evolution of drivers, looking at the past to identify a clearer projection of potential future eventualities. Many of these drivers are interlinked, and taken together, further aggravate need. However, for the sake of the analysis, they are considered separately while acknowledging the interlinked nature of these drivers.

Impacts of intensified natural hazards and climate change as threat multiplier

The effects of climate change are increasingly being felt and have begun affecting ecosystems, human populations, and historical weather patterns, with intensified changes in weather patterns being seen globally.⁵⁷ Analysis from the IFRC calculates an expected 200 million people by 2050 – over double the estimated 108 million people in 2020 – as the amount of people globally affected by climate change and needing some form of international humanitarian assistance, from a combination of climate-related disasters along with the socioeconomic effects of climate change (see Figure 4),⁵⁸

Figure 4: Increase of populations in need of humanitarian assistance as a result of climate-related disasters by 2030 and 2050 (under pessimistic scenario, globally)

Data source: The Cost of Doing Nothing, IFRC



Exposure to climate-related risk

Globally, climate change is increasingly interacting with socio-economic, demographic and political factors exacerbating fragility risks. For the DPRK, a country frequently affected by natural hazards, this means increased droughts, floods and typhoons compounding an already dire, chronic humanitarian need. The 2019 DPR Korea Needs and Priorities from the HCT provides an overview of disasters in the DPRK from 2012-2018 (Figure 5) stressing the detrimental impact of floods, heatwaves, and typhoons which killed and displaced thousands of North Koreans, and damaged thousands of hectares of crops. According to the HCT, 6.6 million North Koreans were impacted by disasters from natural hazards such as drought and floods from 2004 to 2018,⁵⁹ compounding vulnerabilities, and increasing the need for assistance.

The already precarious humanitarian situation, coupled with the large geographic areas exposed to the worsening effects of climate-related threats (for an example see Figure 6: Map defining provinces of high risk as relates to Typhoon Lingling), have the potential for even greater effects on an already vulnerable population.

In early September 2019, Typhoon Lingling was characterised by high winds of 30m per second and flash flooding with rainfall reaching 30mm per hour devastating parts of the country, and displacing an estimated 6,362 people.⁶⁰ Largely attributed to unusually high winds, the typhoon destroyed large amounts of crops in the North and South Hwanghae provinces. IFRC's Pyongyang office reported 75,226 hectares of farmland – a significant increase from the 46,200 initially reported by North Korean media – across many parts of the country.⁶¹ The UN Central Emergency Response Fund allocated US\$6 million to organisations working in the country to, 'improve urgent food security

55 Watson Institute for International Studies and Compliance and Capacity Skills International. (2015, January 19). *High Level Review of United Nations Sanctions: Humanitarian Aspects and Emerging Challenges*. Retrieved from: http://www.hlr-unsanctions.org/HLR_WG3_report_final.19.1.15.pdf

56 Compliance and Capacity Skills International. (2018). *Best Practices Guide for Chairs and Members of the United Nations Sanctions Committee*. Retrieved from: <https://www.comcapint.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/E-Best-Practices-Guide-1.pdf>

57 Inter-Agency Regional Analysts Network. (2017). *The future of aid: INGOs in 2030*. Retrieved from: http://futureofaid.ianr.org/The_Future_Of_Aid_INGOs_In_2030.pdf

58 IFRC. (2019). *The cost of doing nothing: The humanitarian price of climate change and how it can be avoided*. op. cit

59 HCT. (2019). op. cit., p. 9

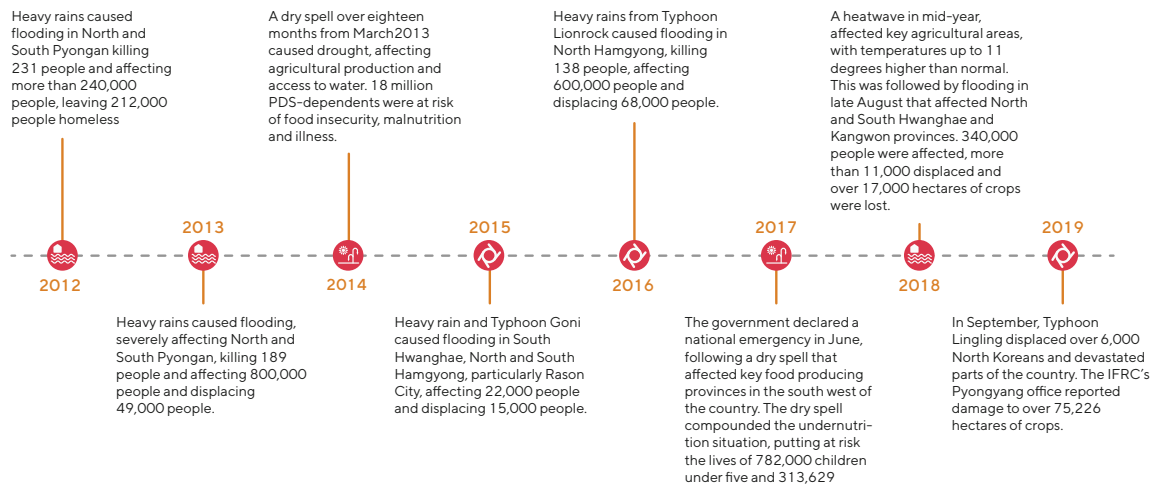
60 IFRC. (2019). *DREF Operation Update DPR Korea: Typhoon Lingling*. Retrieved from: <http://adore.ifrc.org/Download.aspx?FileId=270744>

61 Zwirko, C. (2019, November 28). Typhoon Lingling displaced over 6,000 people on North Korea's east coast: IFRC, *NK News*. Retrieved at: <https://www.nknews.org/2019/11/typhoon-lingling-displaced-over-6000-people-on-north-koreas-east-coast-ifrc/>

Figure 5: Timeline of disasters in the DPRK, 2012-2019

2012–2018 text and data source: DPRK Needs and Priorities 2019, p. 9

2019 data source: IFRC. (2019). DREF Operation Update DPR Korea: Typhoon Lingling



and nutrition interventions, and support increased access to water, sanitation and hygiene services' for the most vulnerable parts of the country impacted by the Typhoon.⁶² The ROK also provided US\$1.7 million in inter-Korean co-operation funds for North Korean villages in Hamgyong and Pyongan Provinces damaged by Typhoon Lingling 'to proceed from the South Korean government through to the national Red Cross and on to International NGOs,⁶³ despite the DPRK rejecting Seoul's offer for food aid channelled through the World Food Programme (WFP) earlier in 2019.

Climate-related risks: Crop production, food insecurity and undernutrition

The FAO and WFP posit that political, economic and climate factors have combined to negatively impact food security over many years in the DPRK.⁶⁴ With an estimated 43% of the population undernourished,⁶⁵ climate-related shocks threaten to exacerbate food insecurity and nutritional deficits. Inadequately addressing key gaps in DPR, may result in disastrous impacts for the country's ability to recover, especially in mitigating risk to areas of food insecurity, undernutrition and the outbreak of disease.

The HCT purport that, 'agriculture annually falls short of meeting needs by approximately one million tonnes,' attributed to shortages of suitable land for growing crops, limited access to modern agricultural equipment and materials (i.e. fertilisers) and frequent natural hazards such as floods and severe droughts leading to destroyed crops.⁶⁶ Looking back over

recent climatic activity there is a worrying impact on crop production, largely due to extended dry spells, high temperatures – such as the occurrence of a heatwave in the middle of 2018 which saw temperatures of 11°C above average – followed by flooding,⁶⁷ and then in 2019 Typhoon Lingling hit. The situation is further compounded by limited supplies of agricultural equipment and materials.⁶⁸

North Koreans are also faced with problems of post-harvest losses, from harvesting to storage. A 2019 FAO and WFP joint rapid food security assessment warned the 2018–19 harvest losses were expected to be higher than usual, due to shortages of fuel, electricity and lack of spare parts,⁶⁹ – which may be partly, or wholly, attributed to political factors. With an increasingly constricted procurement environment it is likely levels of post-harvest losses will increase in the years to come. FAO and WFP's assessment concluded that, 'the situation is serious and could become critical,' summarising that humanitarian intervention is urgently required, 'to ensure that food security needs are met up to the main harvest in the autumn of 2020.'⁷⁰

The FAO's 2019 *Early Warning Early Action report on food security and agriculture* notes that with an already vulnerable population dependent principally on domestic production, 'the harvest is critical for food security and supply throughout the country.'⁷¹ With the DPRK's agricultural capacities not expected to improve, and the country continuing to experience frequent natural hazards, 'the food security situation may deteriorate even further and sharply increase humanitarian needs.'⁷²

62 UN CERF. (2019, October 16). UN Emergency Fund Releases \$6 million to ramp up humanitarian response in DPR Korea. Retrieved at: https://cerf.un.org/sites/default/files/resources/CERF%20allocation%20DPRK_AJ151019_FINAL.pdf

63 Lee, J. (2019, December 24). South Korea to provide US\$1.7 million in aid for North Korean villages damaged by Typhoon Lingling. *Hankyoreh*. Retrieved at: http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/922023.html

64 FAO and WFP. (2019). op. cit., p. 5.

65 FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP, and WHO. (2018). op. cit.

66 HCT. (2019). op. cit. p. 5

67 Ibid.

68 FAO and WFP. (2019). op. cit., p. 17

69 FAO and WFP. (2019). op. cit., p. 43

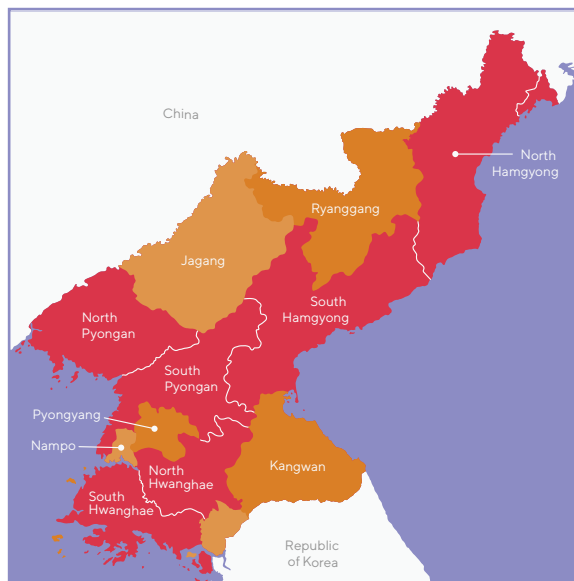
70 FAO and WFP. (2019). op. cit., p. 43

71 FAO. (2019). *Early Warning Early Action Report on Food Security and Agriculture*. Retrieved at: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6372en/ca6372en.pdf>

72 Ibid.

Figure 6: The DPRK, Typhoon Lingling: Disaster Emergency Relief Fund. Map defining provinces of high risk

Original map source: IFRC (2019). *Emergency Plan of Action (EPoA) DPR Korea: Typhoon Lingling*. p.12. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDRKP014%20epoa.pdf>



| Province | Population |
|----------------|------------|
| Pyongyang | 3,194,814 |
| South Pyongan | 3,164,686 |
| North Pyongan | 2,839,589 |
| Jagang | 1,358,116 |
| South Hwanghae | 2,432,669 |
| North Hwanghae | 2,436,552 |
| Kangwon | 1,546,124 |
| South Hamgyong | 3,155,798 |
| North Hamgyong | 2,425,121 |
| Ryanggang | 749,664 |
| Nampo | 1,024,565 |

■ High Risk

It is also important to consider the compounding factors for undernutrition. Over the next decade, with no major geographic hazard, the DPRK's widespread undernutrition will likely continue as it has for the past twenty or so years – ongoing improvement from the mid-1990s famine but with still worrying figures. However, should a major geographical disaster or series of disasters occur – amplified in intensity and incidence by climate change impacts, and compounded by inadequate levels of preparedness – there could be a significant peak in this trend line, a tipping point that has the potential to push an already vulnerable humanitarian situation into an emergency/crisis.

While storms, cyclones, heat waves and other climate and weather-related hazards will undoubtedly continue, their impacts can be mitigated by investing in DRR and

Disaster Risk Management (DRM) activities, climate adaptation, and building resilience in communities and regions at risk, especially when adaptation measures prioritise the poorest and most vulnerable.⁷³ DRR should also be considered across development finance activities. Overseas Development Institute's (ODI) analysis advises that global development finance should be risk-informed, 'where unplanned development creates higher levels of disaster risk, which threatens efforts to eliminate poverty and boost shared prosperity'.⁷⁴

Markedly, in December 2019 the United Nations Green Climate Fund (GCF) approved US\$752,000 funding intended to support the DPRK deal with climate change.⁷⁵ To be implemented through the FAO, activities will focus on building capacity in co-ordinating, managing and prioritising climate finance, engagement with providers of climate finance, as well as the formulation of national adaptation planning processes.⁷⁶ In considering future eventualities, climate change impact on natural hazards, combined with the precarious humanitarian situation and delays in international assistance caused by sanctions, could have amplified effects for the North Korean people.

Multiple barriers degrade aid ability to reach North Koreans in need

Political decision-making, by the DPRK regime, the US, and other key states continue to impact on the ability of aid to effectively reach North Koreans.

The existing political stalemate between the DPRK and the US is likely to continue, as will the DPRK's reluctance to give up its nuclear program, hampering humanitarian organisations' delivery of aid.

Fluctuations in the political landscape external to the DPRK will also influence potential for humanitarian aid to reach the North Korean people. For example, both the US and the DPRK have elections in the next three years – 2020 and 2022, respectively. The outcome of these elections may have significant impact on aid and overall engagement with the DPRK. Both Trump and Moon have shown willingness to engage with Kim Jong-Un, but there is high uncertainty over the tactic their successors (or in Trump's case, potentially himself under a second term) will take towards the DPRK.

With UN OCHA's release of its annual Global Humanitarian Overview (GHO2020), the HCT establishes it will look to focus on food security, nutrition, and 'access to essential services such as health and water,

73 IFRC. (2019). *The cost of doing nothing: The humanitarian price of climate change and how it can be avoided*. op cit.

74 Tanner, T., Lovell, E., Wilkinson, E., Ghesquiere, F., Reid, R. & Rajput, S. (2015, July). Why all development finance should be risk informed. *Overseas Development Institute & Global Facility for Disaster Risk Reduction*.

75 Kim, J. (2019, December 27). UN approves US\$752,000 to help North Korea fight climate change. *NK News*. Retrieved at: <https://www.nknews.org/2019/12/un-green-climate-fund-approves-752000-usd-aid-for-north-korea/>

76 Ibid.

sanitation and hygiene' as priorities for 2020.⁷⁷ The GHO2020 identifies the importance of addressing the 'multiple drivers' of humanitarian needs in the DPRK to address poorly functioning systems in the health, hygiene, and water realms that compound vulnerability,⁷⁸ yet does not provide detail that illustrates the nature of these drivers. The GHO2020 includes reference to other countries internal politics and human rights abuses but for the DPRK assessment, such references are absent.⁷⁹ Previously, the UN has made bolder statements about the root causes of humanitarian need in the DPRK.⁸⁰ This is a reminder of the challenges of maintaining humanitarian access, where prioritising the focus on external factors, such as sanctions, and non-political drivers such as environmental concerns, displays a wider tendency to refrain from mentioning internal political and economic drivers of need.⁸¹

The North Korean regime's actions are, and likely will continue to be, the key driver determining humanitarian need. Without significant and comprehensive reform, which is unlikely, the DPRK's low production and import capacities are likely to continue. As long as the regime allocates priority to the nuclear programme over engagement with the international community, including but not limited to legitimate international trade systems, the levels of humanitarian need are likely to continue, if not intensify. Similarly, areas where the DPRK are willing to allow access for humanitarian programmes, such as boosting crop production, are likely to continue to be hampered by the significant burden of sanctions.

Decline in humanitarian donor support and funding requirements for programming.

Low levels and/or decline in support from humanitarian donors, along with diminished funding requirements are key drivers from the international community likely to impact needs and the ability of humanitarian actors to respond to current and future needs.

Financial support from humanitarian donors – including both bilateral and multilateral efforts – to respond to humanitarian need in the DPRK has been chronically and critically underfunded. In 2019 the DPRK's HCT, which includes both UN agencies and resident NGOs, requested US\$120.3 million to target 3.8 million North Koreans, averaging to about US\$31.66 per targeted individual.⁸² According to the UN's FTS the DPRK's

appeal was only 28% (US\$33.9 million) funded, as of end December 2019,⁸³ the second lowest funded vis-à-vis percentage of funding coverage worldwide. With US\$33.9 million of the appeal actually funded, this average falls to about US\$8.92 per intended recipient in actual spending.

The GHO2020 listed the 2020 appeal for the DPRK at US\$107 million – when compared against 2019 figures this is a notable 11% decrease.⁸⁴ Conversely, analysis of the GHO2020 HCT figures confirm that the number of individuals targeted for assistance has increased by 45% to 5.5 million North Koreans, translating to US\$19.45 per aid recipient of the required funding.⁸⁵

When compared against the GHO's other thirty-one countries included for humanitarian and refugee-focused regional response plans in 2020, it is by far the lowest funding per targeted recipient country, with the second lowest being Ukraine at US\$78.86 per aid recipient, and the global average at US\$264.71 (see Figure 7). While it is challenging to make direct comparisons across contexts to the costs of delivering aid, the DPRK's funding per person is remarkably low.

Past funding suggests that the HCT will not be fully funded by donors, meaning humanitarians will have to try to do more with less.⁸⁶ Humanitarian donor funding may continue to be deterred/decrease due to political considerations, and competing global humanitarian needs. For instance, in a meeting between New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and South Korean President Moon Jae-in, Ardern acknowledged New Zealand had not provided humanitarian aid to the DPRK since 2008, 'with the decision a reflection of the many competing demands for humanitarian aid, not the escalation of the nuclear issue.'⁸⁷ The US, which has pursued a policy of 'maximum pressure' under President Donald Trump, is the world's largest humanitarian donor – in 2019, its contributions made up 36.3% of global funding,⁸⁸ yet it did not contribute at all to the DPRK appeal. Further, with 5.5 million North Koreans targeted by the HCT in 2020, even a fully funded appeal would leave nearly half of the 10.8 million North Koreans the UN identifies as in need without any targeted aid.⁸⁹

77 UN OCHA (2019). *Global Humanitarian Overview 2020*, p. 66. Retrieved from: https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/GHO-2020_v9.1.pdf

78 Ibid.

79 Zadeh-Cummings, N. (2019, December 26). *Lofty goals in challenging circumstances: UN hopes for North Korean aid in 2020*. *NK News*. Retrieved at: <https://www.nknews.org/2019/12/lofty-goals-in-challenging-circumstances-un-hopes-for-north-korean-aid-in-2020/>

80 Zadeh-Cummings, N. (2019, November 8). *Why humanitarian agencies face difficulties in responding to needs in the DPRK*. *NK News*. Retrieved at: <https://www.nknews.org/2019/11/why-humanitarian-agencies-face-difficulties-in-responding-to-needs-in-the-dprk/?t=1576133073491>

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 UN Financial Tracking Service (FTS). Retrieved from: <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/118/summary/2019>

84 UN OCHA (2019). *op. cit.*, p. 28

85 Zadeh-Cummings, N. (2019, December 26). *op. cit.*

86 Ibid.

87 'New Zealand not provided aid to North Korea in 10 years.' (2018, December 4). *RNZ*. Retrieved from: <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/377478/nz-has-not-provided-aid-to-north-korea-in-10-years-pm>

88 UN FTS. (2019). *Funding for 2019 from top 10 donors globally*. Retrieved from: <https://fts.unocha.org/>

89 Zadeh-Cummings, N. (2019, December 26). *op. cit.*

Figure 7: Humanitarian Funding Needs and Requirements Overview for 2020

Data source: Global Humanitarian Overview 2020

| Country plans | 2020 People in Need | 2020 People Targeted | 2020 Funding Requirements | Funding per Person Targeted |
|--------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Afghanistan | 9,380,000 | 7,120,000 | \$732,600,000 | \$102.89 |
| Burkina Faso | 2,200,000 | 1,800,000 | \$295,000,000 | \$163.89 |
| Burundi | 1,740,000 | 630,000 | \$104,000,000 | \$165.08 |
| Cameroon | 4,360,000 | 2,630,000 | \$317,000,000 | \$120.53 |
| CAR | 2,600,000 | 1,600,000 | \$387,840,000 | \$242.40 |
| Chad | 4,800,000 | 2,600,000 | \$500,000,000 | \$192.31 |
| DRC | 15,900,000 | 8,100,000 | \$1,820,000,000 | \$224.69 |
| Ethiopia | 8,000,000 | 6,500,000 | \$973,000,000 | \$149.69 |
| Haiti | 4,649,011 | 2,100,000 | \$252,521,922 | \$120.25 |
| Iraq | 4,100,000 | 1,770,000 | \$520,000,000 | \$293.79 |
| Libya | 880,000 | 340,000 | \$110,000,000 | \$323.53 |
| Mali | 3,600,000 | 2,900,000 | \$365,600,000 | \$126.07 |
| Myanmar | 986,000 | 848,000 | \$215,000,000 | \$253.54 |
| Niger | 3,200,000 | 1,900,000 | \$373,500,000 | \$196.58 |
| oPt | 2,400,000 | 1,500,000 | \$348,000,000 | \$232.00 |
| Somalia | 5,200,000 | 3,000,000 | \$1,034,718,746 | \$344.91 |
| South Sudan | 7,500,000 | 5,600,000 | \$1,540,000,000 | \$275.00 |
| Sudan | 9,300,000 | 5,000,000 | \$1,400,000,000 | \$280.00 |
| Syria | 11,000,000 | 9,000,000 | \$3,300,000,000 | \$366.67 |
| Ukraine | 3,400,000 | 2,000,000 | \$157,751,925 | \$78.88 |
| Venezuela | 7,000,000 | 3,500,000 | \$750,000,000 | \$214.29 |
| Yemen | 24,000,000 | 15,600,000 | \$3,200,000,000 | \$205.13 |
| Burundi RRP | 250,374 | 250,374 | \$235,757,212 | \$941.62 |
| DRC RRP | 740,556 | 740,556 | \$604,567,915 | \$816.37 |
| Nigeria RRP | 0 | 0 | \$0 | \$0 |
| South Sudan RRP | 1,219,334 | 1,219,334 | \$950,987,207 | \$779.92 |
| Syria (3RP) | 5,600,000 | 5,600,000 | \$5,200,000,000 | \$928.57 |
| Bangladesh JRP | 1,284,000 | 1,284,000 | \$871,000,000 | \$678.35 |
| DPR Korea | 10,800,000 | 5,500,000 | \$107,000,000 | \$19.45 |
| Venezuela RMRP | 3,828,000 | 2,474,000 | \$1,346,045,282 | \$44.08 |
| Grand Total | 167,617,275 | 108,806,264 | \$28,890,209 | \$264.70 |

Differentiated vulnerabilities

For practitioners and policy decision-makers alike, it is vital to consider existing, and potentially evolving, differentiated vulnerabilities for highly susceptible groups likely to be exacerbated by these drivers

including for children, women, the elderly and those living with a disability, and especially for those dwelling in rural settings.

| Vulnerable group | Description |
|--|--|
| Children | While UNICEF's multiple cluster indicator survey (MICS) shows that rates of malnourishment in children have improved since the 1990s famine, 1998 MICS data found 62.3% of children under seven were stunted. ⁹⁰ In 2019, the WFP described undernutrition as 'chronic and widespread,' and noted that urgent and continuous support is needed in many rural areas threatened by a nutritional crisis, ⁹¹ with the latest MICS reporting 19.1% of children under five were stunted, and 9.3% were underweight. Further, compared to boys (18.4%) girls have a higher stunting rate (19.9%). ⁹² |
| Women and girls (particularly pregnant and lactating mothers) | It will also be important to consider the gendered impacts of humanitarian need in an already precarious situation, and how this will intersect with more frequent and intensified natural disasters. For example, in times of increased food and economic insecurity- including during the 1990s famine - women are still expected to be working both in an economic capacity as well as primary family caretakers, ⁹³ likely leading to enhanced vulnerability in times of crisis. Pregnant and breastfeeding women and girls will also have increased needs including requirements for essential vitamins and minerals, ⁹⁴ that may not be easily accessible. |
| Rural populations | Conditions are also more severe for those living in rural areas. Official data from the last census in 2008 indicates that 39.4% of the population lived in rural settings, ⁹⁵ though other estimates suggest this figure may be higher. ⁹⁶ UNICEF MICS data found that 24.4% of children under five in rural areas are stunted compared to 15.6% in urban settings, ⁹⁷ highlighting variation in terms of humanitarian need for those living in rural areas. The MICS also posits that while 92.5% of rural households have access to agricultural land, compared to 29.7% of urban households, that 41.2% of the country's rural population belongs to the bottom 20% of the population by wealth index. ⁹⁸ Rural populations will also likely be more severely impacted due to a higher persistent gap in nutritional status compared to urban populations. For example, intensified flooding resulting in significant crop failure may subsequently lead to worsened food security and lessen an already inadequately diverse diet - reinforcing the cycle of undernutrition. Inadequate access to sanitation further aggravates health risks, where lower numbers of rural populations than urban do not have access to basic facilities, at 29% and 16% respectively. ⁹⁹ This is further exacerbated by the limited professional capabilities of health care workers in rural or remote areas to deliver across needs in the health system. ¹⁰⁰ Thus, it will be particularly important to closely monitor rural populations levels of access to WASH and health facilities to avoid detrimental impacts and outbreak of disease in rural regions, especially for DRR activities in anticipating disasters from natural hazards. |
| Those living with a disability and the elderly/infirm | Those living with a disability are among the most marginalized in the country, experiencing numerous impediments to accessing aid and recovery support including low levels of funding for inclusion in humanitarian projects, coupled with a lack of understanding of inclusion. ¹⁰¹ According to the 2014 Disability Sample Survey, 1.6 million of the population have some form of disability and are disproportionately impacted by the impact of natural hazards, ¹⁰² and a distinct lack of disaggregated data continues to present challenges. In addition, the sanctions further complicate many NGOs' ability to provide support for North Korea's disabled especially due to a "dual use" ban on metallic objects prohibit many medical supplies and adaptive equipment from entering North Korea, unless an import license and waiver are obtained, which could take many months or years, if not at all. The elderly and infirm may also experience similar barriers to mobility and accessing life-saving relief and recovery support, especially due to climate change impacts on natural disasters. |

90 UNICEF DPRK. (1998). *Nutritional Survey of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*. Pyongyang: UNICEF DPRK.

91 WFP. (2019). *WFP DPR Korea 2019-2021: Addressing humanitarian needs and undernutrition, reducing disaster risk and responding to crises - February 2019*. Retrieved from: <https://reliefweb.int/report/democratic-peoples-republic-korea/world-food-programme-dpr-korea-2019-2021-addressing>.

92 UNICEF DPRK. (2018). *op. cit.*

93 Korea Peace Now. (2019). *op. cit.* p. 21-22.

94 FAO and WFP. (2019). *op. cit.*, p. 43

95 Central Bureau of Statistics. (2009). *op. cit.*

96 Em, P. P. (2018). *op. cit.*

97 UNICEF DPRK. (2018). *op. cit.*

98 UNICEF DPRK. (2018). *op. cit.*, p. 18-19

99 *Ibid.*

100 HCT. (2019). *op. cit.*, p. 9

101 HCT. (2019). *op. cit.*, p.17

102 HCT. (2019). *op. cit.*

CONCLUSION

It is clear for the foreseeable future humanitarians will be working in a constrained, sanctioned environment in the DPRK, which will continue to impact on aid delivery. What is uncertain however, amongst the backdrop of political fluctuations, is their ongoing level of restriction.

Identifying and understanding the key drivers likely to exacerbate needs in this context will help aid actors to prepare for future eventualities and and mitigate against potential large-scale, intergenerational crisis. Political and fiscal barriers impacting aid ability to reach North Korean people, climate-related impacts on natural hazards, and the challenges in a sanctions-dominated operating environment intersect and compound.

In considering future contingencies – together with delays in humanitarian aid delivery caused by sanctions, potential increases in humanitarian need, and key drivers

likely to exacerbate this need (i.e. impacts of climate change on crop production) – the already vulnerable North Korean people will be the ones left behind by both the DPRK regime, and the international community.

Collective, coordinated and evidence-based advocacy to sanctioning/implementing governments that clearly demonstrates the dire, and accumulative, implications of sustained sanctions intersecting with increased humanitarian need will be critical. In the US, this has already yielded success and should be supported by humanitarians to expand their ability to respond to likely increased humanitarian need. It will also be important to design programs that mitigate against these drivers, closely monitor levels of need, and review indicators (observable measures) to help track events and spot emerging trends for these drivers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For the humanitarian community to:

Closely monitor levels of need from available documentation and insights from other organisations operating inside the country. Tracking key needs, trends, and indicators can improve preparedness to respond to potentially severe health and protection manifestations and mitigate against the potential for large-scale emergency, especially a priority for more at-risk, vulnerable groups.

Continue to engage in the DPRK. The humanitarian imperative to respond to suffering wherever it is found asks humanitarians to continue striving to deliver impartial, neutral, and independent aid to the people of the DPRK.

Develop more DRR projects and/or include more DRR components integrated into existing programmes in the DPRK, to mitigate against/adapt to climate-related risks, especially for increased risk to agricultural production and food security.

Develop programmatic contingency planning for future likely eventualities, given the uncertainty around the nature of the sanctions (i.e. tightening of sanctions, US administration's willingness to engage with Kim Jong Un etc.).

Invest in evidence-based advocacy to demonstrate impact levels of sanctions on delivery of humanitarian aid. Co-ordinated and cohesive sector advocacy to sanctioning/implementing governments will need to clearly understand the accumulative implications of sustained sanctions intersecting with chronic humanitarian need. Particularly call on sanctioning governments (UN member states and unilateral sanctions) to utilise tools such as the CSSI's best practice guidance for Chairs and Members of the United Nations Sanctions Committees.

For the United Nations:

The UNSC, namely the 1718 Sanctions Committee, should continuously monitor and engage with humanitarian agencies to understand, and systematically capture, sanctions impact on aid efforts. An August 2019 mid-term report from the PoE recommended that the Committee be briefed twice a year by UN agencies on unintended sanctions impact, both on the North Korean civil population and on humanitarian operations in the DPRK.¹⁰³ This should

be expanded to include NGO representation and steps should be taken to respond to humanitarian concerns raised in briefings.

The 1718 Sanctions Committee should support the establishment of a recognised exempted banking channel, as a matter of urgency. A recognised banking channel would mitigate some of the problem's humanitarians are currency facing with financial administration. The August 2019 PoE mid-term report noted that the lack of a banking channel was 'hindering' humanitarian efforts.¹⁰⁴ The Committee previously supported the Bank Sputnik channel, granting an exemption in August 2016.

For the United States government:

The US government should redesign the exemption and travel ban process to reduce waiting times and administrative burden. This will in turn support the humanitarian sector to be able to increase efficiency and in turn deliver more effective humanitarian delivery of aid. Administrative (OFAC/BIS/SVP) processes, such as applying for licenses, should be streamlined, clear, and consistent, without political interference. The travel ban could be amended to allow SVPs granted for a length of time, i.e. six months or one year, instead of every trip requiring an application. The political relationship between the DPRK and the US should not adversely impact humanitarian work. All areas of sanctions implementation in the US must recognise the holistic and interconnected nature of humanitarian work, where not only food and medicine impact health and nutrition but also WASH facilities, disaster preparedness, medical and/or adaptive equipment needed for those living with disability etc.

The US Department of the Treasury should strive to mitigate unintended impacts of secondary sanctions, namely reluctance of banks to work with organisations engaged with North Korea. Legal and exempted activities still face challenges. The Department of the Treasury should seek to improve understanding of secondary sanctions amongst banks to ensure legitimate humanitarian activity does not face banking obstacles.

¹⁰³ United Nations Panel of Experts. (2019, August). Report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1874 (2009). Retrieved from: <https://undocs.org/S/2019/691>.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

For donors to:

Fund humanitarian programmes in the DPRK to ensure gains, such as in prevalence of childhood malnutrition, that have been made over the last two decades are not lost. While DPRK is not a 'crisis' or 'emergency' situation, it is highly susceptible to falling into such a disaster. Improvements in the exemptions process cannot be fully operationalised without adequate humanitarian funding. There is a risk of qualitative losses of trust and relationships built by humanitarians if there is no funding for programmes.

Ensure that DRR and measures to reduce the risk of and manage climate-related disasters are adequately funded. There is consistent under-funding as a whole in the aid sector of this aspect of work, despite growing global threats of hazards and vulnerability.¹⁰⁵ If appropriately funded and implemented, DRR activities could reduce/mitigate likely increased needs, as well as costs, and provide a solid 'return on investment'.

For all sanctioning governments (UN member states and unilateral sanctions):

All governments should not allow political considerations to interfere with the exemption's approval and implementation process. Humanitarian aid exists in a political environment, but politics should not be used to hinder efforts to respond to the humanitarian need of North Korean people.

States, including but not limited to China, should ensure that customs officers are familiar with and respect exemptions paperwork. This would help humanitarians navigate project implementation more smoothly, after proper exemptions have been received.

Encourage sanctioning/implementing governments to utilise implementation tools such as the CSSI's 'Best Practices Guide for Chairs and Members of United Nations Sanctions Committees,' to support the development of well-framed humanitarian exemptions and good practice application of sanctions, for the provision of more effective and timely humanitarian aid delivery.

For the DPRK government to:

Allow access to humanitarian and UN agencies, including resident and non-resident groups. Access has improved since the beginning of international humanitarian engagement, though it remains controlled and limited. The DPRK government should allow for more expansion. With greater access, humanitarians can better understand and respond to the needs of North Korean civilians.

Prioritise the humanitarian need of its population as a priority. The international humanitarian community has a duty to the people of the DPRK, but the North Korean government has the primary responsibility.

For banks and suppliers:

Banks and suppliers should be familiar with and respect exemptions. This would help address issues of approved exemptions meeting challenges from third parties.

105 Vorhies, F. Dr. (2012). *The economics of investing in disaster risk reduction*. Working paper based on a review of the current literature commissioned by the Secretariat to the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) Geneva. Retrieved from: <https://www.preventionweb.net/posthfa/documents/drreconomicsworkingpaperfinal.pdf>

APPENDIX: UNSC HUMANITARIAN EXEMPTIONS, JANUARY – DECEMBER 2019

Note: this list includes only publicly posted exemptions

| | Resident | Non-resident |
|------------------------|---|--|
| NGO | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Première Urgence Internationale (European Union Project Support [EUPS] 1*) • Concern Worldwide (EUPS 3) • Deutsche Welthungerhilfe (EUPS 4) • Triangle Génération Humanitaire (EUPS 5) • Handicap International/Humanity & Inclusion (EUPS 7) <p>*resident NGOs do not operate under their own names in the DPRK, instead operating as EUPS</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Médecins sans Frontières • Mennonite Central Committee • World Vision International • Christian Friends of Korea • Eugene Bell Foundation • Ignis Community • First Steps Health Society • Love North Korea Mission (Love North Korea Ministries) • Mission East |
| IO | <p>United Nations (UN):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UNICEF • World Health Organisation (WHO) • United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) <p>Other:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) • International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) | |
| Bilateral/ Regional | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Italy, exemptions for European Union Food Security Office (FSO) and EuropeAid projects • Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation | |