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7th Roundtable on Ag in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea

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Report Highlights:

The Office of Agricultural Affairs hosted the 7th annual Roundtable on Agriculture in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in Seoul on September 13, 2018. This forum brought together participants for a discussion highlighting the agricultural economy, food security and the forestry situation in the DPRK. This event also gave participants new insights and up-to-date intelligence on the DPRK agricultural situation and food markets. This is a summary of the substance shared at the roundtable funded through CSSF as earlier reported in KS 1836.

General Information:

The Office of Agricultural Affairs hosted the 7th annual Roundtable on Agriculture in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in Seoul on September 13, 2018. This forum brought together participants for a discussion highlighting the agricultural economy, food security and the state of forestry in the DPRK. This event also gave participants new insights and up-to-date intelligence on the DPRK agricultural situation and food markets. Speakers featured: Dr. Eul Chul Lim, Professor & Director Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University Center for International Cooperation for North Korean Development, speaking about New Trends of DPRK Agriculture in Science and Technology; Dr. Kwan-Ho Kim, Deputy Director of North Korea Research Center, Korea Rural Community Corporation (KCC), discussing New Economy Design on the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Agricultural Development Cooperation; Mr. Praveen Agrawal, World Food Programme Country Director and Representative in Pyongyang, focusing on a Changing Vision in DPRK; and Dr. Kyung-Seok Park, Senior Research Scientist, Division of Global Forestry/Inter-Korean Forest Research Team, National Institute of Forest Science (NIFOS), Korea Forest Service (KFS), sharing Current Results of DPRK Forest Policy and Future Direction of Inter-Korean Forest Cooperation. There was also a general discussion moderated by Dr. Tae Jin Kwon, Director of the Center for North Korea and Northeast Asian Studies, GS&J.

Notes:

New Trend of DPRK Agriculture in Science and Technology (Emerging Science and Technology Trends in DPRK Agriculture Policy)

By Dr. Eul Chul Lim, Kyungnam University

Dr. Lim has studied North Korea for 27 years and highlighted the lack of reliable statistical information published by the regime as a constant feature of his discipline. While admitting that outside observers can only understand the “tip of the iceberg” with regard to the social and economic situation in the North, Dr. Lim sees clear evidence that the Pyongyang regime has shifted its agricultural policy towards harnessing technology as a way to advance North Korean self-reliance.

Citing numerous sources, both from within the regime and from abroad, Dr. Lim traces North Korea's (and especially Chairman Kim Jong Un's) recent embrace of developing indigenous technology to support agricultural development. These efforts include official proclamations on the importance of science and technology on decision making processes and production methods at collective farms; stated investment into locally developed high tech farm equipment, biology (plant and animal genetics), and production environments (various types of protected agriculture, i.e. greenhouse, hydroponics, etc.); and taking the steps necessary to massively increase grain production as a way of expanding the North's livestock sector. All of these developments still rely heavily on North Korean-developed technology, a nod to the regime's longstanding philosophy of “self-reliance”.

There are two notable anecdotes to the North's emerging shift towards embracing agricultural technology. First, proclamations and publicized tours of high-tech Chinese agriculture indicate the willingness of North Korea to adapt new technology from friendly neighbors. Second, the regime espoused a near-term goal of 60-70 percent of farm work being performed by machinery. In addition to

the investment costs this shift implies, there are also questions regarding the massive numbers of displaced agricultural workers this policy would generate, given the current heavy reliance on manual labor in North Korea, especially in agriculture.

Until new evidence disproves it, the current operational theory is that North Korea is officially dropping its image as a happy, traditional, self-reliant agrarian society in favor of becoming a science and technology powerhouse capable of lifting itself out of poverty, starting with the massive adoption of high tech agriculture.

New Economy Design on the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Agricultural Development Cooperation

By Kim Kwan Ho, Deputy Director of North Korea Research Center, Korea Rural Community Corporation (KCC)

North and South Korea have turned a new page and are now cooperating on certain aspects of North Korea's infrastructure and maintenance/enhancement of its natural resources. Simultaneously, Kim Jong-Un has expressed an interest in improving agricultural productivity through modernization of agriculture. It is expected that inter-Korean economic cooperation will be implemented in the framework of the Korean New Economy Design on the Korean Peninsula. The formation of an inter-Korean economic community includes three economic belts along the peninsula and 10 economic zones in North Korea.

In his 2018 New Year's Greeting, Kim Jong-Un outlined goals of (1) increasing greenhouse production, (2) improving pumping and irrigation, (3) revitalizing aquaculture, and (4) continuing work on the 2nd stage construction of the South Hwanhae Province waterway.

North Korea has an estimated food deficit of 4.58 million tons of food and post-harvest losses are estimated at 15-20%. Causes of food deficiency in North Korea include flooded farmlands, reduced farmer willingness to work, *juche* farming with instructions from the top, lack of agricultural materials, and deterioration of agricultural infrastructure. Problems with North Korea's agricultural infrastructure are both structural and technical. North Korea needs to introduce agricultural technology and capital through reform and opening. Promotion of inter-Korean agricultural development cooperation should be centered on agricultural infrastructure.

In order to promote inter-Korean agricultural development cooperation, the two Koreas should (1) construct agricultural reservoir infrastructure, (2) establish production infrastructure based on cultivation area and crops, (3) develop a focus on Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and Economic Development Zones (EDZs) in North Korea, (4) establish an agricultural infrastructure base centering on climate change response and specialized cultivation, (5) improve the living environment to improve human rights in North Korea, and (6) focus on three types of inter-Korean trade in agriculture (contract cultivation, consignment processing, and direct investment). The development cooperation model in the major EDZs involves (1) holding a joint survey, research, and academic exchange, (2) establishing an irrigation facility for agroforestry, (3) focusing on the Sukchun Agricultural Development Zone (ADZ), (4) establishing a large-scale integrated agricultural complex in the back area of the Kaesong Industrial District, and (5) working on a cooperation plan for the Sepho livestock area.

Changing Vision in DPRK

By Mr. Praveen Agrawal, U.N. World Food Program (WFP) Director and Representative in Pyongyang

Mr. Agrawal's presentation summarized the effects that a recent "triple whammy" of adverse weather conditions has had on agricultural production, specifically corn, in the DPRK this year. Drought, a nationwide heatwave, and localized flash floods this August have reduced the DPRK's total agricultural production by 7.4% and cudgeled an already weak infrastructure. Hwanghae province's corn production will not have a short-term recovery and household food sources have been wiped away, further imposing food dependency upon the state and ultimately displacing over 10,000 people. The DPRK's public distribution system of staple foods is currently hitting just half of its government target of 573 grams of food per person/day, increasing the importance of household gardens to supplement the rationed diet. However, even though the majority of rural households have kitchen gardens of approximately 60m², growing chili peppers, tomatoes, eggplant, pumpkin, and some backyard livestock, diet diversity is lacking and weight loss concerning. Mr. Agrawal highlighted WFP's strategy and ongoing efforts to ameliorate the resulting child malnutrition, which include monitoring food security in rural areas, providing emergency food assistance and fortified foods, and enhancing agricultural resilience through the building of community resources. Due to the lack of resources, WFP-Pyongyang is currently only operating in 60 of 120 counties within 9 of 11 provinces; however, the capacity is available and the need undoubtedly exists—10.3 million people in DRPK are malnourished, 40% of its total population.

Current Results of DPRK Forest Policy and Future Direction of Inter-Korean Forest Cooperation

Dr. Kyung-Seok Park, Senior Research Scientist, Division of Global Forestry/Inter-Korean Forest Research Team, National Institute of Forest Science (NIFOS), Korea Forest Service (KFS)

Mr. Park presented the current results of DPRK forest policy and the future direction of inter-Korean cooperation in forestry. Currently, the DPRK is suffering from severe deforestation in many areas. This is especially a concern in areas with a high population and a high possibility of loss of human life due to landslides caused by torrential rains. The speaker suggested that inter-Korean cooperation for afforestation would be the best way to improve the environment for DPRK's residents.

Deforestation in the DPRK has increased due to the following reasons: (1) an increased number of terrace fields in mountainous areas caused by food shortages since 1976, (2) increased woodcutting for the use of fuel wood caused by economic crisis, (3) damage from forest diseases, insects and forest fires caused by climate change, and (4) an increased use of domestic logs and log exports to China.

As a result of many years of deforestation in North Korea, the area encompassing devastated forests increased 74.2 percent to 2.84 million hectares in 2008 from 1.63 million hectares in 1999. The devastated forest area in 2008 accounted for 31.6 percent of total forest area (8.99 million hectares). The degree of forest devastation in North Korea has become even more serious since 2008.

The DPRK has recognized the seriousness of deforestation and enacted a policy to restore the forests. Kim Jung Un's regime has stressed its goal to create a nationwide forest within a decade. The notable restoration policy of the "10-year (2015 – 2024) plan of North-Korean Style Forest Restoration" takes into account the food and energy shortages in rural areas and introduces an agroforestry management system. Under the plan, the DPRK is conducting the following programs:

- Cultivating saplings: promoting monolithic modernization in accordance with guidance measures
- Construction of a large scale tree nursery
- Production of high efficiency machines for seedling production
- Afforestation: Tree planting by mobilizing the masses, improving the survival percentage of trees planted, continuous follow-up management after plantation, etc.
- Supply forest science and technology

The two Koreas (South and North) had conducted inter-Korean cooperation for forestry under two Presidential Administrations which lasted until May 24, 2010, when former President Lee, Myoung-Bak halted the cooperation after the DPRK's attack on South Korean Naval forces. During the inter-Korean cooperation period, the two Koreas had some positive achievements in forestry but also discovered many limits. The two Koreas developed a mutual reliance initiative and contributed to technology development, but efforts suffered from insufficient financial support, lack of private sector-government cooperation, lack of consistency, and lack of transparency.

Mr. Park suggested that inter-Korean forest cooperation future projects include the following:

- Establishment of an international cooperation institute to promote private-oriented afforestation with the industry, government agencies and the institute
- Propose the promotion of afforestation with cooperation between the two Koreas to the North Korea regime at a suitable moment
- Gradually promote afforestation as a private-public cooperation project: Private funding + Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects of private company + International NGO + International organizations
- Utilize a two-track method for the private sector to develop the new sites for North Korea's afforestation and for the government to scale the sites and make a suitable system for them

Mr. Park also suggested that inter-Korean cooperation in forest restoration reflect the following:

- Establishment of the basis for forest restoration (modernization of tree nurseries and reinforcement of productivity)
- Promote urgent customized afforestation projects
- Execute urgent erosion control projects in landslide danger zones
- Control forest disease and pests
- Supply briquettes/coal and improve furnaces to lessen forest devastation