

Panel: Humanitarian Crisis in North Korea (Lilac/Tulip)

Date/Time: April 25, 2012 / 15:45-17:00

Organizing Institution: The Asan Institute for Policy Studies

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The root of the current food crisis in North Korea lies with the collapse of the public distribution system (PDS.) I'll focus on the gradual dismantling of PDS not as a chaotic process but a deliberate downsizing of the state, with the aim of reducing its economic burden. PDS, with its centralized production and distribution of goods, is inherently incompatible with the North Korean agriculture, which is very labor intensive and geographically concentrated in the western side of the country. Yet the distribution of the population indicates that there must be a large segment of the population that depends exclusively on the PDS for food, therefore disproportionately affected by its failure. Moreover, a significant proportion of the population was never properly served by the PDS. This geographic variation indicates that the full impact of food crisis possibly differs not only by social class, but also by location. The improvement in the economy will not lessen the ongoing humanitarian crisis in North Korea as long as the state focuses its efforts on repairing the PDS.

* The views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of the Asan Institute for Policy Studies.
