



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## On the success and failure of North Korean development aid in Africa

Tycho, T.A. van der; Yonho, K.

### Citation

Tycho, T. A. van der. (2022). On the success and failure of North Korean development aid in Africa. In K. Yonho (Ed.), *NKEF Policy and Research Paper Series* (pp. 31-42). Washington: George Washington University. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3303497>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3303497>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

# IDEOLOGY AND ECONOMIC POLICY IN NORTH KOREA

YONHO KIM, EDITOR, *NKEF Policy and Research Paper Series / 2022*

Institute for  
Korean Studies

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

# About the North Korea Economic Forum

The North Korea Economic Forum (NKEF) is part of the policy program at the George Washington University's Institute for Korean Studies (GWIKS). The Forum aims to promote the understanding of North Korean economic issues, distribute well-balanced, deeply researched, and multi-dimensional insights on the North Korean economy and to expand networks among various North Korea watchers, scholars, and policymakers. The Forum mostly involves closed and off-the-record meetings, where participants can freely and seriously discuss critical issues. Mr. William Brown is currently the chair of NKEF and is leading the meetings. NKEF also organizes special conferences made public throughout the academic year. The Forum is made possible by a generous grant provided by the KDI School of Public Policy and Management.

## Editorial Board

**JISOO KIM** (*Director of GWIKS and Korea Foundation Associate Professor of History, International Affairs, and East Asian Languages and Literatures at GW*)

**JOHN MERRILL** (*Non-Resident Scholar at GWIKS and former Chief of the Northeast Asia Division in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research*)

**JOONGHO KIM** (*Non-Resident Scholar at GWIKS and former Senior Research Fellow at the Export-Import Bank of Korea*)

**TROY STANGARONE** (*Senior Director and Fellow at the Korea Economic Institute*)

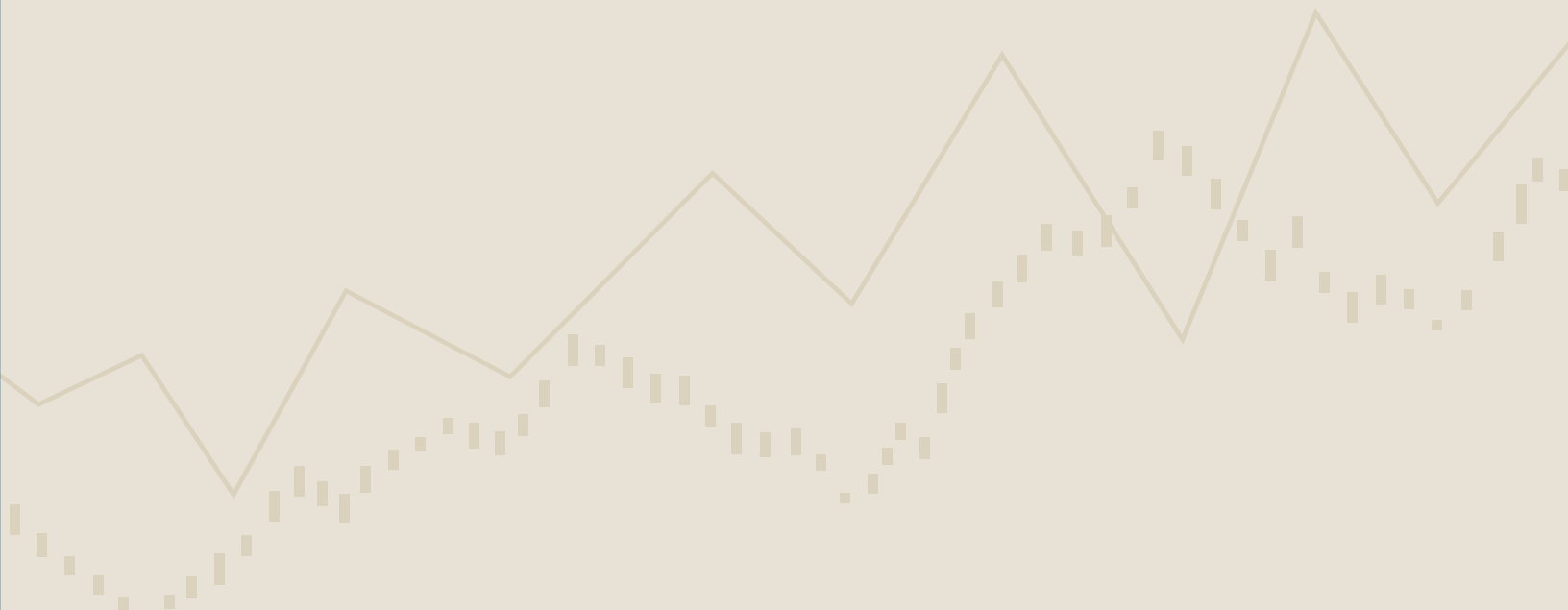
**WILLIAM BROWN** (*Chair of the North Korea Economic Forum at GWIKS and former Senior Advisor to the National Intelligence Manager for East Asia in the Office of the Director of National Intelligence*)

**WILLIAM NEWCOMB** (*Fellow at C4ADS and former Member of UN Panel of Experts for North Korea*)

**YONHO KIM** (*Associate Research Professor of Practice and Associate Director of GWIKS*)

# Table of Contents

<b>PREFACE</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	
<b>Economic Ideology: A Refreshing Approach to Studying the North Korean Economy?</b> William Brown	<b>3</b>
<b>IDEOLOGY AND ECONOMIC POLICY IN NORTH KOREA</b>	
<b>Cheollima, Ten Times Faster? The Gangseon Steel Mill and the Cultural Turn in North Korea’s Mass Mobilization Campaign</b> Pil Ho Kim and Makayla Cherry	<b>7</b>
<b>Global Finance Through the Lens of North Korean State Literature</b> Meredith Shaw	<b>20</b>
<b>On the Success and Failure of North Korean Development Aid in Africa</b> Tycho van der Hoog	<b>31</b>
<b>Rose-Colored Glasses: The Information Ecosystem’s Influence on Generational Variation in Attitudes on North Korea’s Economic Management</b> Jonathan Corrado	<b>43</b>
<b>BIOGRAPHIES</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</b>	<b>61</b>



TYCHO VAN DER HOOG

# On the Success and Failure of North Korean Development Aid in Africa

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores the largely unknown history of North Korean development aid in Africa. In the second half of the twentieth century, Pyongyang was an important partner for recently liberated African countries and actively using development aid as a tool for its foreign policy, the ultimate aim being to gain international recognition. Development aid is an ideal window for viewing the nexus between ideology and economy

in North Korea, given that the two were intertwined in establishing agricultural projects on foreign soil. In the 1980s, North Korea tried to export its Juche-inspired model of agriculture (Juche is North Korea's ideology centered around the concept of self-reliance) to countries in Africa, as illustrated in the case studies of Tanzania and Ghana. Using novel primary sources from South Korean, European, and African archives, this paper argues that North Korean development aid may have been a diplomatic success but failed in practice.

## INTRODUCTION

In the second half of the twentieth century, North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK) was an important partner for recently liberated African countries. African-North Korean friendship was fostered on a diplomatic level, often encouraged by strong personal ties between Kim Il Sung and the first generation of African leaders.<sup>1</sup> It became manifest in military cooperation, such as training

---

1. Benjamin R. Young, *Guns, Guerrillas, and the Great Leader: North Korea and the Third World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021).  
2. Joseph S. Bermudez, *Terrorism, the North Korean Connection* (New York: Crane Russak, 1990); N. Michishita, *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008* (London: Routledge, 2010); Andrea Berger, *Target Markets: North Korea's Military Customers in the Sanctions Era* (London: Routledge, 2016); Bruce E. Bechtol, *North Korean Military Proliferation in the Middle East and Africa: Enabling Violence and Instability* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018).

missions and the exchange of military hardware.<sup>2</sup> Ideology also played a significant role, and the North Korean gospel of Juche (self-reliance) was shared with African allies by establishing Juche Study Centers and distrib-

Most studies on North Korean global activities emphasize success rather than failure. Highlighting the friendly relations between Kim Il Sung and foreign leaders, the training of armies and insurgents, profitable deals cut through

Korean aid mainly took the form of agricultural development, and to a lesser extent construction work, medical aid (by dispatching doctors), and military advice—though the military advice could be better framed as military cooperation, not as aid. Agriculture is the main focus in both case studies. Using previously unpublished files from South Korean, British, Swedish, South African, and Namibian archives, this paper aims to shed light on a form of cooperation that in the end did not have a lasting impact yet deserves to be recorded.

***During the Cold War, Africa was in transition toward independence. Ghana, located in West Africa, and Tanzania, part of East Africa, performed important regional roles for the liberation of southern Africa.***

uting translated North Korean books and magazines.<sup>3</sup> A visible relic of the friendship are the numerous North Korean statues, cemeteries, museums, and other buildings in Africa that were built after independence in the respective countries.<sup>4</sup> Less known, however, are the development projects North Korea undertook.

The history of DPRK development aid in Africa is largely unexplored but offers important lessons about North Korea's engagements with the rest of the world. The goal of development aid is in essence to transform a society, often in a way that mirrors the standards of the donor country—in this case, the perceived paradise of Pyongyang and its hinterland. Development aid is thus an ideal window through which to view the nexus of North Korean ideology and economic policy outside the borders of the DPRK. One reason this cooperation remains largely unexamined might be that the aid did not have a lasting impact. North Korean aid could no longer be continued after the end of the Cold War for a lack of funds, but indications are that existing projects in Africa were already failing.

North Korean embassies and companies—existing scholarship usually aims to refute the popular notion of North Korea as an isolated “hermit kingdom” by proving the many ties that bind North Korea to the rest of the world. Yet the focus on success might be a methodological fallacy—in fact, many DPRK projects fail. Setting the state propaganda aside and switching what is an elitist lens to a more grounded experience of this strand of Afro-Asian solidarity, it becomes clear that the DPRK sometimes missed the mark. Scholar should not underestimate the importance of failing: even a failed relationship is a relationship—and therefore worth studying.<sup>5</sup>

This paper examines the developmental relations of North Korea with two African countries, Ghana and Tanzania. Although located on opposite sides of the continent, each has been a hub and gateway for numerous African liberation movements and thus the future leaders of not-yet-liberated countries. It therefore made sense for North Korea to invest there and thus showcase the North Korean model of development, given that these were strategic and regionally important locations. North

## LIBERATION AND SOCIALISM

During the Cold War, Africa was in transition toward independence. Ghana, located in West Africa, and Tanzania, part of East Africa, performed important regional roles for the liberation of southern Africa. Their first elected presidents—respectively Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere—were shaping the post-independence future of the continent. The development of newly independent African nations was influenced by assistance from outside actors, including socialist countries. Within this framework of South-South cooperation, large countries such as the Soviet Union and China are well-known donor countries; smaller actors such as the DPRK are more easily overlooked.<sup>6</sup>

Although the transfer of North Korean expertise to Africa was part of a larger trend of socialist aid, it would be a mistake to view the DPRK as a Soviet or Chinese surrogate. During the Sino-So-

3. Igor Dobrzeński, “Juche Ideology in Africa: Its Origins & Development,” *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia*, no. 32 (2019): 117–38.

4. Meghan L. E. Kirkwood, “Postindependence Architecture through North Korean Modes,” in *A Companion to Modern African Art* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 548–71; Godwin Komes, “Nordkorea Transnational: Arbeiten Des Mansudae Art Studios in Frankfurt Und Windhoek,” in *Zugehörigkeiten: Erforschen, Verhandeln, Aufführen - Im Sinne von Carola Lentz*, edited by Jan Beek, Konstanze N’Guessan, and Mareike Späth (Köln: Köppe, 2019), 121–45, [https://www.academia.edu/39839768/Nordkorea\\_transnational\\_Arbeiten\\_des\\_Mansudae\\_Art\\_Studios\\_in\\_Frankfurt\\_und\\_Windhoek\\_2019\\_](https://www.academia.edu/39839768/Nordkorea_transnational_Arbeiten_des_Mansudae_Art_Studios_in_Frankfurt_und_Windhoek_2019_); Tycho van der Hoog, *Monuments of Power: The North Korean Origin of Nationalist Monuments in Namibia and Zimbabwe* (Leiden: African Studies Centre Leiden, 2019); The Sentry, “Overt Affairs,” 2020, <https://thesentry.org/reports/overt-affairs>; The Sentry, “Artful Dodgers,” 2021, <https://thesentry.org/reports/artful-dodgers>.

5. To paraphrase Frederick Cooper, who eloquently observed that “Unequal relationships are still relationships and they can be pushed and pulled on.” See Lisa Lindsay and Moses Ochonu, “History Class,” *Africa Is a Country* (blog), November 18, 2020, <https://africasacountry.com/2020/11/history-class>.

6. In recent years, research has uncovered the ties between Africa and a number of smaller socialist countries in addition to the Soviet Union and China: Gareth M. Winrow, *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa, Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511559334>; Philip Muehlenbeck, *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945–1968* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-56666-9>; Kali Argyriadis, Giulia Bonacci, and Adrien Delmas, eds., *Cuba and Africa, 1959–1994: Writing an Alternative Atlantic History* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2020).

viet split, North Korea was remarkably skilled in charting its own foreign policy course.<sup>7</sup> Its involvement with African countries was primarily motivated by the competition with South Korea (ROK) for political support. A British official rightly observed that “The North Koreans have pitched their appeal, in the eyes of recipients of their aid, very much as a small, unthreatening country, seeking and promoting independence of great power influence.”<sup>8</sup> The independence from major powers once again reinforced the success of North Korea’s self-reliance model, which was particularly appealing to countries that were hostile to foreign (or at least Western) investment.<sup>9</sup>

Ghana was a source of inspiration for large parts of Africa, in that Kwame Nkrumah (1909–1972), the country’s first president (1960–1966), was a figurehead of practical and ideological importance for African liberation movements. Nkrumah ensured that exiled movements received financial assistance and military training in Ghana through the Bureau of African Affairs, years before the Organization of African Unity (OAU) did the same in Tanzania through the Liberation Committee. Accra, Ghana’s largest city and capital, was also where in 1958 the All-African People’s Conference was organized, a pivotal moment in the history of African liberation.<sup>10</sup> North Korean officials had visited it as early as 1965, when Ghana hosted the Fourth Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) Conference.<sup>11</sup> The AAPSO also organized two conferences in Tanzania (in 1960

and 1963), and years later also one in Pyongyang (in 1987). It is likely that party officials from African countries and the DPRK met in venues such as these. The AAPSO considered the struggle in southern Africa to be one of its main priorities and at the same time was an avid support of the North Korean regime.<sup>12</sup>

High-ranking Ghanaian politicians were not the only ones to visit Pyongyang. North Korea also invited newspaper editors, who sometimes spent months at a time in the DPRK capital. North Korea advertised in Ghanaian newspapers and pushed for anti-South Korean coverage. The South Korean embassy tried to counter these messages but found that often the editors were “totally bought off by North Korea.”<sup>13</sup> Nkrumah was ousted in a military coup in 1966, which also resulted in severed diplomatic ties between Ghana and the DPRK as a succession of military and civilian governments followed. In 1981, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), led by the charismatic Jerry Rawlings, came into power, and relations with the DPRK became once again fraternal.<sup>14</sup> A PNDC delegation traveled to Pyongyang to explain their new policy and reassured their hosts that their “Africa policy” included full support for the liberation struggles in southern Africa, including the liberation movements of Namibia and South Africa. Further, the new government of Ghana “wholeheartedly expressed its support to the DPRK” in its vision of the future of the Korean peninsula.<sup>15</sup>

Tanzania was one of the original Frontline States, a coalition of countries that opposed the apartheid rule of South Africa and therefore offered support to southern African liberation movements.<sup>16</sup> The struggle became the “touchstone” of Tanzanian foreign policy.<sup>17</sup> Dar es Salaam was the headquarters of the Liberation Committee of the OAU, which sought to support the anti-colonial cause.<sup>18</sup> The city thus became a hub for exiled freedom fighters, several national liberation movements having established their offices there.<sup>19</sup> For this reason, North Korea invested much time and money in developing a close relationship with the Tanzanian regime. The DPRK embassy in Dar es Salaam was their largest foreign office in Africa and the only one built by the Koreans themselves. They even dispatched a special diplomat to foster ties with the exiled national liberation movements from the wider region.<sup>20</sup>

The ties between Tanzanian political elites and the DPRK were quite close. Tanzanian party members regularly traveled to Pyongyang for political conferences or the opportunity to study party organization.<sup>21</sup> In the 1970s, North Korea established an Institute for Political Affairs in Zanzibar. The school consisted of seven North Korean instructors who provided three-month courses in ideological education for the members of the Tanzania People’s Defense Forces and members of the Afro-Shirazi Party, a party that in 1977 merged with the Tanganyika African

7. Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 19.  
8. NAUK, FCO 21/3213, Relations between Uganda and North Korea.  
9. NAUK, FCO 31/948, Political relations between Somali Democratic Republic and North Korea.  
10. Matteo Grilli, “Nkrumah’s Ghana and the Armed Struggle in Southern Africa (1961–1966),” *South African Historical Journal* 70, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 56–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2018.1439524>.  
11. ROKDA, 1448, AAPSO Je4cha a.a inmindangyeolgigu [The 4th Afro-Asian People’s Solidarity Conference] Accra Ghana 1965.5.9-16  
12. NAI Library, Pamphlet Collection, Regional Cooperation: AAPSO. The AAPSO “fully supported” the plans of Kim Il Sung for the reunification of the Korean peninsula and condemned the “fascist rule” of the US government and the “puppet clique” of the South Korean government.  
13. ROKDA, 17450, Bukan · gana gwangye [North Korea-Ghana Relations], 1982.  
14. PNDC-related organizations also dedicated time to commemorate the Ghanaian-Korean friendship. For example, the June Four Movement, a militant mass revolutionary movement that sought to keep the revolutionary spirit alive, celebrated an annual “month of solidarity with the Korean people.” The Ghana-Democratic People’s Republic of Korea Friendship Society also held meetings to this end. ROKDA, 26593, Bukan · gana gwangye [North Korea-Ghana Relations], 1987–88.  
15. ROKDA, 21926, Bukan · gana gwangye [North Korea-Ghana Relations], 1985.  
16. Gilbert M. Khadiagala, *Allies in Adversity: The Frontline States in Southern African Security 1975–1993* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007).  
17. NAUK, FCO 31/976, Tanzania’s relations with Communist countries.  
18. Chris Saunders, “SWAPO, Namibia’s Liberation Struggle and the Organisation of African Unity’s Liberation Committee,” *South African Historical Journal* 70, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 152–67, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2018.1430846>.  
19. George Roberts, “Politics, Decolonisation, and the Cold War in Dar Es Salaam c.1965–72” (PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2016), <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/87426>.  
20. Interview with an anonymous former North Korean diplomat working in Africa, July 19, 2021. A delegation from the Liberation Committee was also invited to Pyongyang in April 1974 (NAUK, FCO 31/1739, Liberation Committee of Organisation for African Unity).  
21. NAUK, FCO 31/3263, Visits between Tanzania and communist countries; FCO 31/3674, Relations between Tanzania and North and South Korea.  
22. The Afro-Shirazi Party (ASP), together with the Umma Party, started the Zanzibar Revolution in 1964. Before the school was established, DPRK delegations as well as athletic coaches and youth workers had already traveled to Zanzibar. An “active literature placement program” was in place. The man responsible for the organizing the school was Colonel Seif Bakari, a man described as the most powerful man in the local military and an “admirer” of the North Korean system (ROKDA, 8253, Bukan · tanjania gwangye [North Korea-Tanzania Relations]).

National Union (TANU) into Chama Cha Mapinduzi, still the ruling party of Tanzania.<sup>22</sup> North Korea was thought to have “considerable potential political influence” through their advisors in the Youth League of TANU in mainland Tanzania.<sup>23</sup> The Tanzania-Korea Friendship Society, founded in 1970, held regular monthly meetings in the North Korean embassy in Dar es Salaam.<sup>24</sup> The society translated and published the works of Kim Il Sung in Swahili.<sup>25</sup>

In sum, the newly elected leaders of Africa looked east for political and ideological inspiration. In a 1974–1975 edition of the *Third World Forum*, a publication sponsored by the Afro-Asian Latin American People’s Solidarity Committee, North Korea was hailed as an example for Africa. The author, Peter Lawrence, praised the rapid development of the DPRK as an export country, despite its relatively small population. Tanzania, for example, could benefit from “major lessons” from this experience.<sup>26</sup> This kind of celebratory literature was not unusual. In 1965, the Cambridge economist Joan Robinson praised the development of North Korea, writing that “All the economic miracles of the postwar world are put in the shade by these achievements.”<sup>27</sup> After the conclusion of the Korean War, the economic growth of the DPRK was rather impressive even as the US-backed South Korea suffered under a dictatorship and slow economic growth.<sup>28</sup> African elites were thus far more in favor of the North and remained informed about the peninsula from not only publications such as the *Third World Forum* or Western media, but also translated North Korean magazines such as *Korea Today* and the *Foreign Trade of the DPRK*.<sup>29</sup>

## JUCHE AND AGRICULTURE

The focus of DPRK literature was of course Juche, its own ideology of self-reliance.<sup>30</sup> One of the main aims of this display of ideological prowess was to convince the world of the global applicability of Juche, especially for the developing world. In Africa, this effort was primarily to establish Juche study centers. Accra, for example, was the home of the Ghana National Institute of the Juche Idea, which was founded in 1981.<sup>31</sup> The institute organized meetings in venues adorned by portraits of Kim Il Sung and a display of his works and photographs of North Korea, where Ghanaians would read keynote reports, discuss North Korean literature and agreed upon collective letters to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il.<sup>32</sup> In 1988, for example, the institute organized a special drive of book-reading five hundred pages to mark the fortieth anniversary of the DPRK. Several study groups in Tanzania also held regular meetings, one being a seminar in 1989 in which discussion centered on “For the Development of Agriculture in African Countries,” a speech by Kim Il Sung during a symposium in 1981. This symposium was attended by several ministers of agriculture of African countries, including the minister from Tanzania.<sup>33</sup>

Juche was always formulated in incredibly vague terms and stressed the importance of self-reliance, which made it relatively easy to connect Juche thought to the desire of liberated nations in Africa to be independent. This was, for example, publicly confirmed by Seretse Khama, the first president of Botswana: during a mass rally in Pyongyang, Khama proclaimed that the Batswana

national principle of *ipelegeng/boipele-go*, which translates into self-reliance or self-help, was compatible with Juche.<sup>34</sup> In Zambia, Juche was thought to be in line with the ideas of Zambian humanism put forward by the first president, Kenneth Kaunda.<sup>35</sup> In Tanzania, the official ideology of the ruling party, *ujaama*, revolved around the central themes of “self-reliance, rural development, public control over the economy and social equality”—concepts that very much aligned with Juche.<sup>36</sup>

The African enthusiasm for Juche was widely shared across the continent, as evident in recurring issues of the journal *Study of the Juche Idea*. In this journal, ordinary non-Koreans could submit articles that either reviewed their travel experiences in Pyongyang or examined how Juche was relevant for their home country. These usually focused on a particular theme such as the economy, philosophy, art, or education. Every issue would carry submissions from interested Africans, such as E. S. Mushi, a civil servant from Tanzania, who wrote in 1989 that he was “deeply impressed and amazed” by what he had witnessed during his travels in North Korea, “the beacon of hope and a model of socialism.” The Juche model could be applied to all facets of an independent nation state, including agriculture. During the Cold War, several articles throughout the years dealt specifically with Juche and agriculture in Africa. Jean Rakotoarivelo, a school principal in Madagascar, hailed the south-south cooperation between the DPRK and other developing countries, particularly in the field of agriculture:

[The DPRK] in particular is giving vital assistance towards solving the

23. NAUK, FCO 31/976, Tanzania’s relations with Communist countries.

24. NAUK, FCO 31/692, Relations between North Korea and Tanzania.

25. NAUK, FCO 95/860, Tanzania: relations with North Korea.

26. UNAM Archives, PA3/6/121, *Third World Forum*. Quebec: *Third World Forum*, 1974/75.

27. Joan Robinson, “Korean Miracle,” *Monthly Review*, January 2, 1965, 541–49, [https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-016-09-1965-01\\_2](https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-016-09-1965-01_2).

28. Bruce Cumings, *Korea’s Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 423.

29. See, for example, UNAM Archives, PA4/5/138, *Foreign Trade of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea: 1987*; PA3/6/67, *Korea today*. – Pyongyang: The Foreign Language Magazines, 1992.

30. Brian Reynolds Myers, *North Korea’s Juche Myth* (Busan: Sthele Press, 2015).

31. UNAM Archives, PA4/5/421, *Study of the Juche Idea: 1979–1990*.

32. ROKDA, 17450.

33. UNAM Archives, PA4/5/421; NAUK, FCO 31/3263, Visits between Tanzania and communist countries.

34. Boga Thura Manatsha, “Geopolitical Implications of President Seretse Khama’s 1976 State Visit to North Korea,” *Botswana Notes and Records* 50 (2018): 138–52.

35. NAUK, FCO 106/850, Political relations between Zambia and communist countries.

36. Dharam Ghai and Reginald Herbold Green, “Ujamaa and Villagisation in Tanzania,” in *Agrarian Systems and Rural Development*, edited by Dharam Ghai et al. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979).



food problem and laying the foundations of agricultural production in many African countries: it is helping these institutions based on the Juche farming methods created by President Kim Il Sung, and sending its agricultural scientists, technicians and irrigation experts to these countries.<sup>37</sup>

In 1986, the Tanzanian R. Nyambuka referred to the symposium in an issue of the *Study of the Juche Idea* by describing the progress subsequently made in his country. "The cooperation between Tanzania and the DPRK shows that newly-emerging countries have good experience and techniques for mutual cooperation," Nyambuka wrote, mentioning the "great successes achieved in the agricultural field through the cooperation between Korean and Tanzanian agricultural scientists and experts."<sup>38</sup> No comprehensive study of such agricultural interventions has ever been undertaken, however. The scant evidence suggests that in truth North Korean development aid did not live up to the praise of North Korea's admirers, as illustrated in two case studies.

Juche agriculture was "the poster child" for the successful socialist modernization of the DPRK. Chong-Ae Yu argues that soon after North Korea was established, the state "embarked on a modernization project that fundamentally transformed its society from agrarian to industrial, with the aim of achieving food self-sufficiency." The key to this project was the perception of agriculture as a matter of national security. In practice, Juche agriculture consisted of rescaling the land through collectivization and the heavy techno-

logical intervention. The use of capital intensive, mechanized production, the heavy application of agro-chemicals, an extensive system of irrigation, and mono-cropping were essential.<sup>39</sup> In the 1950s, according to Balázs Szalontai, North Korean agricultural production was "very low" and techniques were "quite primitive." Severe food scarcity led to a crisis in 1955.<sup>40</sup> In 1978, howev-

## TANZANIA

The aid relationship between Tanzania and North Korea, politically close countries, commenced in the 1970s. A few years earlier, in 1967, Nyerere announced the Arusha Declaration and TANU's Policy on Socialism and Self-Reliance. This policy was Tanzania's

***North Korea's miraculous economic growth, coupled with its philosophy of self-reliance, thus made the DPRK an attractive partner for countries across Africa that sought to achieve the same.***

er, the US Central Intelligence Agency reported that the North Korean "grain production may have grown at a more rapid pace" than South Korea, due to its advances in agriculture.<sup>41</sup> In 1984, the DPRK had a record grain production and exceeded the consumption requirements of its population. Its ability to supply the daily caloric requirements to its population was "consistently higher" than that of China.<sup>42</sup>

Most African countries were at the time predominantly rural. Agriculture—especially subsistence farming—was vital for large parts of the population in Ghana, Tanzania, and other African nations. Lynn Krieger Mytelka observes that "the limited scope and scale of African industrialization was widely regarded as an opportunity" as newly independent states developed policies to nationalize and modernize industries.<sup>43</sup> North Korea's miraculous economic growth, coupled with its philosophy of self-reliance, thus made the DPRK an attractive partner for countries across Africa that sought to achieve the same.

philosophy of self-reliant development and one of multiple examples where African postcolonial political ideologies aligned very well with Juche. The declaration stated that "agriculture is the basis of development", and stressed that "Tanzanians can live well without depending on help from outside if they use their land properly."<sup>44</sup> Agricultural aid from North Korea was thus a logical way to strengthen the ties between both countries.

The first DPRK agricultural project in Tanzania, the Dakawa Rice Irrigation Project, was launched in 1975 near Morogoro and became known as the Cheollima Agricultural Science Institute. Located two hundred kilometers from Dar es Salaam, this 260 million shilling project concerned two thousand hectares (roughly five thousand acres) of rice fields and facilities to process paddy and store ten thousand tons of rice.<sup>45</sup> The project was funded primarily by the African Development Bank and the Tanzania Development Bank, but executed with the help of North Korean ex-

37. UNAM Archives, PA4/5/421.

38. UNAM Archives, PA4/5/421.

39. Chong-Ae Yu, "The Rise and Demise of Industrial Agriculture in North Korea," *Journal of Korean Studies* 12, no. 1 (2007): 75-109.

40. Balázs Szalontai, *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953-1964* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 63-65.

41. Central Intelligence Agency, *Korea: The Economic Race Between the North and the South, 1978*. It should, however, be noted that the report acknowledges that higher production levels did not automatically result in higher living standards. In fact, while grain production may have grown faster in North Korea, "general living standards improved faster in the South." I want to thank William Brown for his useful comments on this important point.

42. Yu, "Rise and Demise."

43. Lynn Krieger Mytelka, "The Unfulfilled Promise of African Industrialization," *African Studies Review* 32, no. 3 (1989): 77-137, <https://doi.org/10.2307/524549>.

44. NAI Library, Pamphlet Collection, Tanzania: National Liberation Movements: TANU: TANU, The Arusha Declaration and TANU's Policy on Socialism and Self-Reliance, 1967.

45. ROKDA, 23558, Bukan · tanjania gwangye [North Korea-Tanzania Relations], 1985-86.

perts.<sup>46</sup> Dakawa was a strategic location, because it was also closely connected to the exile camps of the African National Congress (ANC), the South African liberation movement that gained power in 1994. In 1982 the Tanzanian government granted 7500 acres (300 ha) of land at Dakawa to the ANC, for the construction of the ANC Development Centre. The goal was to develop self-reliant agriculture and house 5000 exiled South Africans who would prepare for independence.<sup>47</sup> The North Korean Dakawa Rice

Agriculture Joseph Mungai traveled to Pyongyang for a special agriculture meeting, after which teams of Korean experts were dispatched to eight regions in the country. In all, 105 advisors were set to work abroad: thirty on irrigation projects, forty-eight in maize production, ten on vegetable garden projects, and others on feasibility studies for mini-hydroelectric power stations. Dozens more followed in later years.<sup>49</sup> In 1985, for example, a team of twelve North Korean experts visited Tanzania to survey areas suitable for irriga-

southern Africa's liberation struggle—was again confirmed by this decision. The center was constructed by the DPRK, a large and expensive project that took two years and estimated as costing approximately £2.4 million.<sup>54</sup> It is clear that in the eyes of the Kim regime, Tanzania was set to become an example of Juche agriculture for the rest of the African continent. The DPRK wanted Tanzania become self-reliant in terms of food and proposed ambitious plans for irrigated farmlands around Lake Victoria (two hundred

thousand hectares) and the Rufiji River basin (fifty thousand), which should result in the production of 1.5 million tons of food per year. Tanzania was promised machinery and technical support. Agriculture was simply the basis: the Kore-

*Prime Minister Rashidi Kawawa praised the “exemplary” work of the Koreans in his country, which he said was an example of “that spirit of hard work and dedication which has made Korea a strong and prosperous nation.”*

Irrigation Project (or Cheollima Agricultural Science Institute), however, came to a conclusion in 1982, having been delayed for a year because of a difference of opinion between the Koreans and other workers. Similar to their Ghanaian counterparts, the Tanzanian hosts paid for the accommodation, international transport, leave, and salaries of the Korean advisors.

In subsequent years, cooperation between the countries deepened from 1981 onward. In June 1981, an eighteen-man North Korean delegation led by Prime Minister Jong Ok Li visited Tanzania for five days and offered to help their host with irrigation and hydro-power projects, particularly experts to advance modern agriculture techniques such as “soil science, seed improvement, fertilizer application and the operation of agricultural machinery.”<sup>48</sup> A few months later, in August 1981, Tanzanian Minister of

tion farming. Shortly after the submission of the first report, Tanzanian Vice President Ndugu Mwinyi visited the DPRK to discuss the prospects of irrigated agricultural projects.<sup>50</sup> The agreement also included an interest-free loan for machinery. A DPRK team stayed for five years on a farm in the Iringa region, where they supervised farm work and established a weather forecasting station and tools for a workshop.<sup>51</sup> Meanwhile, former president Nyerere's home village became a hotspot for North Korean agricultural experts and town planners, probably not a coincidence considering the symbolic location.<sup>52</sup>

In 1982, the construction of an Agro-Scientific Research Center was announced. It had a distinct regional function for East and Central Africa and was therefore a great opportunity to market Juche methods in neighboring countries.<sup>53</sup> The strategic location of Tanzania—not just for

ans developed plans for brick and tile production, medical training, a national irrigation program, and seven hundred technical drawings for parks, gardens, and playing grounds.<sup>55</sup>

The North Koreans clearly pushed for Juche-style development in Tanzania, but their African hosts expressed public gratitude to the Kim regime. Prime Minister Rashidi Kawawa praised the “exemplary” work of the Koreans in his country, which he said was an example of “that spirit of hard work and dedication which has made Korea a strong and prosperous nation.”<sup>56</sup> This was of course music in the ears of the Koreans and a diplomatic victory. In 1985, a few years after the flurry of aid projects and propositions began, Nyerere traveled to Pyongyang with a large entourage to meet with Kim Il Sung and discuss the progress of their mutual enterprises. During a banquet

46. British diplomatic staff observed that “The North Koreans will no doubt continue to gain cheap credit here by providing experts to superintend projects financed from other sources” (NAUK, FCO 21/1879, Foreign policy of North Korea).

47. NAI Library, Pamphlet Collection, South Africa: National Liberation Movement: ANC: Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, ANC Development Centre, Dakawa, ANC progress report, 1982/1983; SOMAFSCO, Official Opening, 21-23 August 1985.

48. NAUK, FCO 21/1879, Foreign policy of North Korea.

49. The irrigation projects included “4000 hectares around Lake Victoria; 5000 hectares in Kilombero Valley; 3000 hectares along the Lukosi River, in Iringa Region; 200 hectares at Kalenga, on Pemba; 1000 hectares in the Rufiji River basin; 600 hectares at Mwanampuli dam, in Tabora Region; and a further area long the Kitivo River, in Tanga Region” (NAUK, FCO 31/3674).

50. ROKDA, 23558.

51. ROKDA, 23558.

52. NAUK, FCO 31/3674.

53. ROKDA, 23558.

54. NAUK, FCO 31/3674.

55. ROKDA, 23558; NAUK, FCO 31/3674.

56. ROKDA, 6029, Bukan · tanjania gwangye [North Korea-Tanzania Relations].

in his honor, Nyerere thanked the Great Leader: "We greatly appreciate the work which Korean citizens have done, and are doing, to help in our agricultural development. [The Koreans] are innovative, and encourage by example and practical action the development of our self-reliance. I can only say thank you."<sup>57</sup>

Careful archival research revealed to some extent the aid relation between Tanzania and North Korea but is of little use to assess the outcomes of these projects. In terms of the continuation of the Tanzania-Korean aid relation, it is likely that the limited funds of the DPRK in the post-Cold War era prevented further cooperation. While it lasted, however, the British embassy reported that North Korea was able to maintain "a high profile here at little real cost." In terms of optics, the DPRK aid was clearly successful in that it was able to project a public image of success. The deployment of Korean experts in various projects around the country left the impression that said projects were also funded by the DPRK, though usually they were not. "The overriding impression," one cynical British embassy official wrote, "is that of one poor, agricultural national helping another."<sup>58</sup> Although the Tanzanian case study does reveal the establishment of a large number of smaller and larger projects, much empirical evidence attests to the day-to-day operations of these projects. The Ghanaian case study, on the other hand, includes a detailed assessment of an agricultural aid project that was similar to the ones established in Tanzania and elsewhere in Africa. This story contains a number of clues that show that such aid projects were, contrary to the public image of success, not as rewarding as intended.

## GHANA

The aid relation between Ghana and the DPRK similarly reached a peak in the

1980s. Between 1982 and 1983, the North Koreans provided technological aid and expertise to develop 13,200 hectares (32,618 acres) of farmland in the West African country and supported the establishment of three agricultural research stations in the vicinity of Accra, which were used as training centers for Ghanaian farmers. In this instance, the DPRK organized the storage of agriculture products and equipment, and in return Ghana promised to export produce to the DPRK as payment. The same year, North Korea developed the Ghana Juche Farm in Akatsi, near the Togolese border, a project proudly announced on the front page of a national newspaper. The fifty-hectare farm produced rice, corn, and other vegetables. It was agreed that in subsequent years the farm would be enlarged to about one hundred hectares and that the knowledge gained there would be applied to other areas across the country.<sup>59</sup>

However, poor results led to the decision to move the Akatsi team to Aveyime, a rice farm some ninety kilometers from the capitol city of Accra and operated by the Ghanaian Development Authority (IDA). The Aveyime Rice Project would become the centerpiece of Ghana-DPRK aid relations. It is one of the few if only DPRK aid projects described in detail, in a book by Donald Bobiash. The North Korean team arrived in 1984 with the aim of providing technical assistance in rice cultivation. The team consisted of five members: a rice specialist, a mechanical engineer, an irrigation engineer, an interpreter, and a group leader. It brought with it fertilizer, a bulldozer, four Cheolima tractors (named after the mythical winged horse), and a plow.<sup>60</sup>

IDA, remarkably, did not request the presence of the North Korean team in Aveyime and one interviewed executive confessed that he had not seen any

documentation about the offer of aid. Nor was he informed about how long the team would be staying or how the finances were organized. That IDA was not aware of the arrival of the North Koreans indicates that this decision was made at the highest administrative level and thus politically motivated rather than economically based on developmental needs. Bobiash suggests that one explanation might be the ties between radical factions of the ruling military junta and the DPRK.<sup>61</sup> South Korean embassy cables reveal that indeed the details of this project were discussed during the 1982 visit of a Ghanaian minister to Pyongyang for Kim Il Sung's birthday.<sup>62</sup>

The Ghanaian government was eager to receive North Korean agricultural experts. The administration provided air transportation (including an annual holiday trip to the DPRK), local transportation, accommodation, food, and a living allowance. The South Korean embassy cynically remarked that the North Korean demands "are bigger than the aid itself, and their purpose is to advertise their propaganda rather than to help."<sup>63</sup> Despite the high expectations of both the Ghanaian and the North Korean governments, the project failed miserably. First, local staff did not want the assistance and, second, preparation was minimal. The Korean equipment broke down on the unfamiliar terrain and was difficult to repair because no spare parts were available. Contact between the North Koreans and the Ghanaians was also limited, in part because of communication problems, the one interpreter apparently difficult to understand. Social relations between the two nationalities, Bobiash observed, "were poor, and at times appeared overtly hostile."<sup>64</sup> The development of the Ghana Juche Farm in Ghana thus followed a similar pattern

57. ROKDA, 23558.

58. NAUK, FCO 31/3674.

59. ROKDA, 17450.

60. Donald Bobiash, *South-South Aid: How Developing Countries Help Each Other* (London: MacMillan/St. Martin's Press, 1992).

61. Bobiash, *South-South Aid*. Indeed, a Ghanaian newspaper in 1982 wrote that the DPRK "is to set up agricultural research stations and experimental farms in the country as her contribution to the PNDC's green revolution" (ROKDA, 17450).

62. The project was further discussed during high-level meetings between the North Korean Foreign Economic Business Department and the Ghanaian State Committee for Economic Cooperation (see ROKDA, 17450).

63. ROKDA, 17450.

64. Bobiash, *South-South Aid*.

65. NAUK, FCO 31/3674.

as the Cheollima Agricultural Science Institute in Tanzania.<sup>65</sup>

The North Koreans executed a field survey and repaired an irrigation pump, which IDA appreciated. In terms of agricultural yields, however, the results were disappointing. To the request for twenty hectares to conduct rice-growing trials, the Ghanaians provided only one because they had no confidence in the abilities of the North Koreans. The yield on this hectare was half the usual average yield of the farm, despite heavier use of fertilizer, and thus seemed to confirm this suspicion. During a 1986 visit of North Korean Vice Premier Jun Gi Jeong to the farm, Ghanaian officials explained the need to reappraise the project and see how the North Koreans “could be fully integrated into better projects” considering the disappointing results.<sup>66</sup> In 1989, the two governments signed a technical services agreement that resulted in the arrival of seven North Korean irrigation experts for the Accra Plains Irrigation Project. Despite the concerns from local staff about the progress of the projects, this team also worked on the Aveyime Rice Project. Again, Ghana paid the accommodation, feeding, and logistical costs of the team, which stayed in the country for fifteen months.<sup>67</sup>

The available archival evidence indicates that the Aveyime Rice Project was possibly the focal point of North Korean development aid to Ghana. Bilateral relations were strained for a number of years after Kwame Nkrumah was ousted but resumed when the PNDC came into power in the 1980s. Agricultural aid from the DPRK was particularly welcome for the newly installed revolutionary regime. We can, however, observe a clear disconnection between high-level political aspira-

tions and the on-the-ground experiences of the farmers and staff members. What eventually happened with the Aveyime Rice Project is unclear, but it can be assumed that, with the end of the Cold War, the North Korean team returned home a few years after the project’s inception. “Any long-term contribution to self-reliance or development of local resources would be limited,” Bobiash concludes.<sup>68</sup>

## DEVELOPMENT AID AS FOREIGN POLICY

The highs and lows of North Korea’s aid relation to Africa unfolded in what can be fairly described as the long 1980s, marked by two international conferences in Pyongyang. For decades, the DPRK had been investing in strong and often personal ties to the newly established regimes in Africa; this ensured that several African agriculture ministers attended the Symposium of the Non-Aligned and Other Developing Countries on Increasing Food and Agricultural Production in Pyongyang in August 1981. As noted earlier, during a consultative meeting of ministers of agriculture from eastern and western Africa, Kim Il Sung gave an eloquent speech in which he stipulated that it would not be enough to simply organize a symposium and agree on a declaration—practical action was necessary. Kim vowed to increase agricultural production in East and West Africa by providing farm machinery, irrigation projects, and experts. The 1981 symposium was thus the kick-off of the North Korean agricultural campaign on the African continent.<sup>69</sup>

The North Korean aid crusade was framed as “South-South cooperation,” a phrase

coined for the “building of independent economies based on self-reliance” that implies the central role of Juche ideology in North Korean development aid. Kim believed that African countries had won political independence, but had yet to gain economic independence. The North Koreans were convinced that their efforts to invoke south-south cooperation would ultimately establish the New International Economic Order. Their African allies offered vocal support. The PNDC government of Ghana, for example, confirmed that it “strongly believed” and were committed to this vision.<sup>70</sup> Ultimately, the Korean strategy aimed to rally support within the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) for its foreign policy objectives, which sought to diminish South Korea’s standing in the world.<sup>71</sup> The DPRK was a member of the NAM and the ROK was not, which presented the DPRK an opportunity to improve its prestige and further isolate its rival.<sup>72</sup>

North Korea is estimated to have undertaken aid programs in at least twenty African countries.<sup>73</sup> In Lesotho, the DPRK team rebuilt the national stadium, ran vegetable farms, and experimented with maize production and irrigation, although frustration arose on the basis of the North Koreans’ language difficulties and their failure to submit reports to the Ministry of Agriculture.<sup>74</sup> The Seychelles benefited from the donation of thousands of tons of cement for housing projects, tractors for agricultural development and the supply of rice for a reduced price.<sup>75</sup> In Angola, the North Koreans ran an irrigation project and were involved in the production of cotton and the construction of a dam. The Angolans turned down the offer to establish state farms.<sup>76</sup> The Zambian government was grateful for in paddy rice growing.<sup>77</sup> During a visit to Zimbabwe in

66. ROKDA, 23535, Bukan · gana gwangye [North Korea-Ghana Relations], 1986.

67. ROKDA, 28215, Bukan · gana gwangye [North Korea-Ghana Relations], 1989.

68. Bobiash, *South-South Aid*.

69. The exclusion of southern Africa can be explained through the political situation at the time, when large parts of that region were embroiled in liberation wars (DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Immortal Program Illuminating Road to Agricultural Development in African Countries,” *ForeignPolicyWatchdog*, August 31, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20220201154322/https://foreign-policywatchdog.com/north-korea/immortal-program-illuminating-road-to-agricultural-development-in-african-countries>).

70. ROKDA, 21926.

71. NAUK, FCO 21/2876, North Korea and the Non-Aligned Movement.

72. Nate Kerkhoff, “North Korea and the Non-Aligned Movement: From Adulation to Marginalization,” *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 28, no. 1 (May 7, 2020): 41–71, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18765610-28010003>.

73. NAUK, FCO 31/3922, Political relations between Ethiopia and North Korea.

74. NAUK, FCO 105/1889, Bilateral relations between Lesotho and Communist countries; FCO 105/2183, Relations between Lesotho and Communist countries.

75. NAUK, FCO 31/2433, Relations between the Seychelles and the Communist states.

76. NAUK, FCO 21/3884, External relations of North Korea.

1981, Jeong Ok Li promised “total assistance” in the agricultural development of Zimbabwe when he toured a farm.<sup>78</sup> Other programs were implemented in Guinea, Equatorial Guinea, Burkina Faso, and Uganda.<sup>79</sup> More examples can be found in archival repositories around the world—it is a history yet to be written.

The orchestrated campaign to woo African allies through agriculture reached its pinnacle in 1987 in Pyongyang with the Extraordinary Ministerial Conference of the NAM on South-South Cooperation. This four-day summit resulted in the Pyongyang Declaration and Plan of Action on South-South Co-operation, a lengthy document that outlined an entire new world order, based on the principles of Juche thought.<sup>80</sup> The conference had a clear African connection, in that the decision to organize it in Pyongyang was made in Harare, Zimbabwe, during the 8th Non-Aligned Summit in 1986.<sup>81</sup> Robert Mugabe was a friend of Kim Il Sung and not only admired the North Koreans for their military prowess—an appreciation manifested in the establishment of the 5th Brigade—but also for their achievements in agriculture.<sup>82</sup> When he ascended to power in 1980, Mugabe publicly praised the 5th Brigade and suggested that “Zimbabwe had much to learn from the North Korean experience.”<sup>83</sup> In Kim Il Sung’s keynote speech at the 1987 conference, he expressed his “deep gratitude” to the government of Zimbabwe and underlined the importance of agriculture by summarizing the premise of North Korean development aid to Africa:

The developing countries must advance agriculture. . . . It is a most

appropriate type of cooperation that the non-aligned countries, having set an inspiring target of achieving complete self-sufficiency in food as soon as possible, undertake joint venture in agriculture through various forms and means and closely cooperate with each other in the construction of irrigation works, in the improvement of farming methods, in researches on agricultural science and in the production of farm machinery.<sup>84</sup>

The Pyongyang conferences, one in 1981 and one in 1987, were ideal opportunities to market the North Korean experience to foreign parties. The importance of the African bloc should not be underestimated given that it accounted for dozens of votes in multilateral fora.<sup>85</sup> The DPRK was always a sharp observer of the times and thus able to connect with developing nations around the world, but its campaign for south-south cooperation was ultimately overtaken by external geopolitical shifts it could not control. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the DPRK was thrown into economic disarray and no longer able to fund its projects in Africa and beyond. Because nothing left to prop up the North Korean economy, the Public Distribution System in the DPRK collapsed. A widespread famine followed, Kim Il Sung died, new leadership was assumed, and North Korea would never be the same again.<sup>86</sup> The North Korean embassies in Africa went into survival mode and were instructed to earn money rather than spend it on aid. The era of development was over.<sup>87</sup>

North Korean aid is thus a thing of the past. The examples of Ghana and

Tanzania offer a number of observations relevant to DPRK development assistance in Africa. North Korea was usually keen to offer aid and tried to push their expertise on envisaged host countries, as in Ghana. Their offers were repeated multiple times even if the partners were reluctant.<sup>88</sup> A common feature was the invitation diplomacy of the DPRK, in which high-level African political elites were received in Pyongyang and deals were made.<sup>89</sup> Most African countries signed large and vague friendship treaties with North Korea that covered many areas, including technical assistance and agriculture.

The tradition of top-down decisions in Pyongyang demonstrates the scant thought given to on-the-ground advice from experts. Nor was there much room for preparation. This is showcased in the Ghana study, where the deployment of Korean advisors was decided by political elites and eventually failed because local staff did not accept it. As discussed, the language barrier between the Korean and local staff was a problem, as it was when imported tractors and other equipment broke down on unfamiliar terrain. Yet, despite such issues, African host countries usually offered to pay the salaries and other costs of the foreign advisors.

The issue of development is inherently political, and in the case of North Korean aid the objectives of ideology and economy went hand in hand.<sup>90</sup> Juche was the alpha and omega of North Korean aid, as reflected in the names of the Ghana Juche Farm and

77. This probably concerned a rice-production scheme near Mumbwa (NAUK, FCO 21/4124, External relations of North Korea; FCO 106/850).

78. University of South Africa Archives, *Spotlight on Zimbabwe* 2, no. 4 (August/September 1981). I thank Brooks Marmon for sharing this file with me.

79. DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Immortal Program Illuminating Road.”

80. UNDL, A/42/411, Letter dated 87/07/06 from the Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

81. UNAM Archives, PA4/12/73/22, “Report of the delegation of the United Nations Council for Namibia to the extraordinary ministerial conference of the movement of non-aligned countries on South-South co-operation, held at Pyongyang from 9 to 13 June 1987,” A/AC.131/260, October 5, 1987; NAUK, FCO 21/3602, North and South Korea and the Non-Aligned Movement Summit, Harare, August-September 1986.

82. See for a discussion from different perspectives, see Lyong Choi and Il-young Jeong, “North Korea and Zimbabwe, 1978–1982: From the Strategic Alliance to the Symbolic Comradeship between Kim Il Sung and Robert Mugabe,” *Cold War History* 17, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 329–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2017.1328406>; Benjamin R. Young, “An Emotional Relationship: Trust, Admiration, and Fear in North Korea-Zimbabwe Relations, 1976–1988,” *S/N Korean Humanities* 4, no. 2 (2018): 129–49; Tycho van der Hoog, “Uncovering North Korean Forced Labour in Africa: Towards a Research Framework,” in *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale*, edited by Remco Breuker and Imke van Gardingen (Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2018), 67–83.

83. NAUK, FCO 36/2764, Involvement of Korea in Rhodesian problem.

84. ROKDA, 25182, Namnamhyeomnyeoge gwanhan bidongmaeng teukbyeol gangnyohoeui. Pyeongyang [Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on South-South Cooperation, Pyeongyang], 1987.6.9-6.13. no. 17 (V.17).

85. See, for example, ROKDA, 25177, Namnamhyeomnyeoge gwanhan bidongmaeng teukbyeol gangnyohoeui. Pyeongyang [Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on South-South Cooperation, Pyeongyang], 1987.6.9-6.13. no. 17 (V.12).

86. Lankov, *The Real North Korea*, 75.

87. Interview with an anonymous former North Korean diplomat working in Africa, July 19, 2021.

88. ROKDA, 17450.

89. Sang-Seek Park, “Africa and Two Koreas: A Study of African Non-Alignment,” *African Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (1978): 73–88, <https://doi.org/10.2307/523764>.

90. No evidence indicates that economic development aid was directly linked to military cooperation or was used as a front for espionage. Korean aid was indeed a practical way to gain influence in Africa and improve North Korea’s standing in the world, but at the same time it is credible that Kim Il Sung was genuinely interested in supporting his African allies and aiding the anti-imperialist cause.

the Cheollima Agricultural Science Institute in Tanzania. North Korean farms, however, were not suitable venues for promoting socialist ideas given that language problems and cultural differences meant that exchanges between local staff and foreign experts were at best limited. Ideological education mainly occurred through the Juche study centers established all over Africa and through political exchanges between DPRK nationals and ruling party members from African countries. On the other hand, the emphasis on Juche might explain the little preparation in North Korean aid projects for local circumstances. Juche was designed as a one-size-fits-all ideology. North Korea saw all African countries as the same, as having an experience similar to North Korea's: postwar, anti-imperialist nations with a desire for self-reliance. Yet the conditions on African soil were often very different than in the mountains of the Korean peninsula.

## CONCLUSION

During the Cold War, North Korea presented itself as a development model for newly liberated nations. Its remarkable reconstruction after the Korean War was impressive and caught the eye of African leaders. North Korea had a vision for a new world that was articulated through its ideology of self-reliance and could be backed up by its military power. Yet crucial evidence demonstrates that its attempts to help recently liberated African countries were fraught with difficulties. This article has sketched an outline of North Korean development aid, an unknown area of African-North Korean cooperation where the pitfalls of North Korean foreign policy can be observed.

The Tanzanian study demonstrates the diplomatic success of North Korean agricultural aid, in that the Tanzanian government was prepared to indulge many North Korean aid projects and publicly praise the regime. Yet this study also contains hints of failure. One is the men-

tioned delay in the development of the Dakawa Rice Irrigation Project because of problems between local and Korean staff members. A further assessment of the day-to-day operations of the Tanzanian projects is difficult without access to Tanzanian archives. However, the Ghanaian study provides a detailed, empirical assessment of a rice project in many ways comparable to other North Korean aid projects in Africa. It shows that fundamental organizational problems could render aid projects largely unsuccessful even as North Korea publicly boasted of its domestic economic development. At the same time, an element of diplomatic success could be argued given the close ties between the Ghanaian and Korean political elites at the time.

In other words, the Tanzanian study is a story of diplomatic success but includes elements of practical failure, whereas the Ghanaian study is the other way around. The connection between economic policy and ideology is distinct in this area of cooperation in that the practical failure of North Korean development aid was in part also the failure of Juche. B. R. Myers argues that Juche was unlikely to function as a coherent ideological framework but instead the key to Pyongyang's external propaganda.<sup>91</sup> Juche worked wonders in North Korea's pursuit of an independent foreign policy but fell flat when executed in Africa through agricultural projects. Simply copying the North Korean methods of Juche agriculture on African soil did not work in practice, as the Ghana study makes clear, a field study of the Korean yielding far lower results than local methods despite heavy use of fertilizer.

Today, no Juche farms in Africa are active. Even though this form of aid is thing of the past, we can distill three lessons that may inform contemporary policies on African-Korean cooperation. The first is that diplomatic success can trump actual. The extensive aid relationships between African countries and North Korea does not mean that they were successful on a practical level

or even appreciated by the staff that executes the collaborative projects. This article stresses an obvious but important disconnect between political aspirations and on-the-ground realities. The second is that this disconnect can only be observed through empirical findings, which necessitates shifting the lens from high-level diplomacy to low-level experiences. As this article shows, empirical research concerning DPRK projects on foreign soil is difficult but possible—and necessary—to determine the ups and downs of North Korean foreign policy. The study of Bobiash shows a different picture than is shown in the diplomatic cables from South Korea or the United Kingdom. We need to refine our methodologies for such undertakings, one that makes it possible to find and analyze North Korean foreign projects on a small scale. Thirdly, it should be underlined that the motives for African-Korean cooperation may diverge from the goals of the agreed projects. In the 1980s agriculture was the buzzword for North Korean aid projects in Africa. Yet the larger goal was to win support for the 1987 conference in Pyongyang about South-South Cooperation and the development of a new world order. Contemporary cooperation projects may also relate to different and larger ambitions of the countries involved.

The British embassy in Dar es Salaam shrewdly remarked that the Koreans appeared to be much more involved in African development than they were.<sup>92</sup> In terms of diplomacy and public relations, the outsourcing of North Korean experts, the establishment of Juche farms in Africa, and the public praise from African leaders for North Korean agriculture constituted a major victory for the North Korean regime. Ultimately, external geopolitical factors, such as the fall of the Soviet Union and the subsequent economic crisis in North Korea, ensured that these aid programs were discontinued and North Korea's dream of leading the developing world in the quest for South-South cooperation would vanish. ■

91. Myers, *North Korea's Juche Myth*.  
92. NAUK, FCO 31/3674.

# REFERENCES

## Archival Collections

**National Archives, United Kingdom (NAUK).** Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). 105/1889, Bilateral relations between Lesotho and communist countries.

- . FCO 106/850, Political relations between Zambia and communist countries.
- . FCO 21/1879, Foreign policy of North Korea.
- . FCO 21/2876, North Korea and the Non-Aligned Movement.
- . FCO 21/3213, Relations between Uganda and North Korea.
- . FCO 21/3602, North and South Korea and the Non-Aligned Movement Summit, Harare, August-September 1986.
- . FCO 21/3884, External relations of North Korea.
- . FCO 21/4124, External relations of North Korea.
- . FCO 31/1739, Liberation Committee of Organisation for African Unity.
- . FCO 31/2433, Relations between the Seychelles and the Communist states.
- . FCO 31/3261, Relations between Tanzania and communist countries.
- . FCO 31/3263, Visits between Tanzania and communist countries.
- . FCO 31/3674, Relations between Tanzania and North and South Korea.
- . FCO 31/3922, Political relations between Ethiopia and North Korea.
- . FCO 31/692, Relations between North Korea and Tanzania.
- . FCO 31/948, Political relations between Somali Democratic Republic and North Korea.
- . FCO 31/976, Tanzania's relations with Communist countries.
- . FCO 36/2764, Involvement of Korea in Rhodesian problem.
- . FCO 95/860, Tanzania: Relations with North Korea.

**Republic of Korea Diplomatic Archives (ROKDA).** 1448, AAPSO Je4cha a.a inmindangyeolgigu [The 4th Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Conference]. Accra Ghana 1965.5.9-16.

- . 6029, Bukan · tanjania gwangye [North Korea-Tanzania Relations].
- . 8253, Bukan · tanjania gwangye [North Korea-Tanzania Relations].
- . 17450, Bukan · gana gwangye [North Korea-Ghana Relations]. 1982.
- . 21926, Bukan · gana gwangye [North Korea-Ghana Relations], 1985.
- . 23535, Bukan · gana gwangye [North Korea-Ghana Relations], 1986.

——. 23558, Bukan · tanjania gwangye [North Korea-Tanzania Relations], 1985-86.

——. 25177, Namnamhyeomnyeoge gwanhan bidongmaeng teukbyeol gangnyohoeui. Pyeongyang [Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on South-South Cooperation, Pyeongyang], 1987.6.9-6.13. no.17 (V.12).

——. 25182, Namnamhyeomnyeoge gwanhan bidongmaeng teukbyeol gangnyohoeui. Pyeongyang [Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on South-South Cooperation, Pyeongyang], 1987.6.9-6.13. no.17 (V.17).

——. 26593, Bukan · gana gwangye [North Korea-Ghana Relations], 1987-88.

——. 28215, Bukan · gana gwangye [North Korea-Ghana Relations], 1989.

**Nordic Africa Institute (NAI) Library.** Pamphlet Collection, Regional Cooperation: AAPSO.

——. NAI Library, Pamphlet Collection, South Africa: National Liberation Movement: ANC.

——. NAI Library, Pamphlet Collection, Tanzania: National Liberation Movements: TANU.

**United Nations Digital Library (UNDL).** A/42/411, Letter dated 87/07/06 from the Permanent Representative of Zimbabwe to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General.

**University of Namibia (UNAM) Archives.** PA3/6/121, Third World Forum. - Quebec: Third World Forum, 1974/75.

——. PA3/6/67, Korea today. - Pyongyang: The Foreign Language Magazines, 1992.

——. PA4/1/2/73/22, Report of the delegation of the United Nations Council for Namibia to the extraordinary ministerial conference of the movement of non-aligned countries on South-South co-operation, held at Pyongyang from 9 to 13 June 1987, A/AC.131/260, October 5, 1987.

——. PA4/5/138, Foreign Trade of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea: 1987.

——. PA4/5/421, Study of the Juche Idea: 1979-1990.

**University of South Africa Archives.** *Spotlight on Zimbabwe 2*, no. 4 (August/September 1981).

## References Cited

**Argyriadis, Kali, Giulia Bonacci, and Adrien Delmas, eds.** *Cuba and Africa, 1959-1994: Writing an Alternative Atlantic History*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2020.

**Bechtol, Bruce E.** *North Korean Military Proliferation in the Middle East and Africa: Enabling Violence and Instability*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2018.

- Berger, Andrea.** *Target Markets: North Korea's Military Customers in the Sanctions Era.* London: Routledge, 2016.
- Bermudez, Joseph S.** *Terrorism: The North Korean Connection.* New York: Crane Russak, 1990.
- Bobiash, Donald.** *South-South Aid: How Developing Countries Help Each Other.* London: MacMillan - St. Martin's Press, 1992.
- Central Intelligence Agency, Korea:** *The Economic Race Between the North and the South,* 1978.
- Choi, Lyong, and Il-young Jeong.** "North Korea and Zimbabwe, 1978-1982: From the Strategic Alliance to the Symbolic Comradeship Between Kim Il Sung and Robert Mugabe." *Cold War History* 17, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 329-49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682745.2017.1328406>.
- Cumings, Bruce.** *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History.* New York: W. W. Norton, 1997.
- Dobrzaniecki, Igor.** "Juche Ideology in Africa: Its Origins & Development." *Acta Asiatica Varsoviensia*, no. 32 (2019): 117-38.
- DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs.** "Immortal Program Illuminating Road to Agricultural Development in African Countries." *ForeignPolicyWatchdog*, August 31, 2021. <https://web.archive.org/web/20220201154322/https://foreignpolicywatchdog.com/north-korea/immortal-program-illuminating-road-to-agricultural-development-in-african-countries>.
- Ghai, Dharam, and Reginald Herbold Green.** "Ujamaa and Villagisation in Tanzania." In *Agrarian Systems and Rural Development*, edited by Dharam Ghai, Azizur Rahman Khan, Eddy Lee, and Samir Radwan. New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979.
- Grilli, Matteo.** "Nkrumah's Ghana and the Armed Struggle in Southern Africa (1961-1966)." *South African Historical Journal* 70, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 56-81. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2018.1439524>.
- Hoog, Tycho van der.** *Monuments of Power: The North Korean Origin of Nationalist Monuments in Namibia and Zimbabwe.* Leiden: African Studies Centre Leiden, 2019.
- . "Uncovering North Korean Forced Labour in Africa: Towards a Research Framework." In *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale*, by Remco Breuker and Imke van Gardingen, 67-83. Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2018.
- Kerkhoff, Nate.** "North Korea and the Non-Aligned Movement: From Adulation to Marginalization." *Journal of American-East Asian Relations* 28, no. 1 (May 7, 2020): 41-71. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18765610-28010003>.
- Khadiagala, Gilbert M.** *Allies in Adversity: The Frontline States in Southern African Security 1975-1993.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2007.
- Kirkwood, Meghan L. E.** "Postindependence Architecture through North Korean Modes." In *A Companion to Modern African Art*, 548-71. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2013. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118515105.ch28>.
- Kornes, Godwin.** "Nordkorea Transnational: Arbeiten Des Mansudae Art Studios in Frankfurt Und Windhoek." In *Zugehörigkeiten: Erforschen, Verhandeln, Aufführen - Im Sinne von Carola Lentz.*, edited by Jan Beek, Konstanze N'Guessan, and Mareike Späth, 121-45. Köln: Köppe, 2019. [https://www.academia.edu/39839768/Nordkorea\\_transnational\\_Arbeiten\\_des\\_Mansudae\\_Art\\_Studios\\_in\\_Frankfurt\\_und\\_Windhoek\\_2019\\_](https://www.academia.edu/39839768/Nordkorea_transnational_Arbeiten_des_Mansudae_Art_Studios_in_Frankfurt_und_Windhoek_2019_).
- Lankov, Andrei.** *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Lindsay, Lisa, and Moses Ochonu.** "History Class." *Africa Is a Country* (blog), November 18, 2020. <https://africasacountry.com/2020/11/history-class>.
- Manatsha, Boga Thura.** "Geopolitical Implications of President Seretse Khama's 1976 State Visit to North Korea." *Botswana Notes and Records* 50 (2018): 138-52.
- Michishita, N.** *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008.* London: Routledge, 2010.
- Muehlenbeck, Philip.** *Czechoslovakia in Africa, 1945-1968.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-56666-9>.
- Myers, Brian Reynolds.** *North Korea's Juche Myth.* Busan: Sthele Press, 2015.
- Mytelka, Lynn Krieger.** "The Unfulfilled Promise of African Industrialization." *African Studies Review* 32, no. 3 (1989): 77-137. <https://doi.org/10.2307/524549>.
- Park, Sang-Seek.** "Africa and Two Koreas: A Study of African Non-Alignment." *African Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (1978): 73-88. <https://doi.org/10.2307/523764>.
- Roberts, George.** "Politics, Decolonisation, and the Cold War in Dar Es Salaam c.1965-72." PhD diss., University of Warwick, 2016. <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/87426/>.
- Robinson, Joan.** "Korean Miracle." *Monthly Review*, January 2, 1965, 541-49. [https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-016-09-1965-01\\_2](https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-016-09-1965-01_2).
- Saunders, Chris.** "SWAPO, Namibia's Liberation Struggle and the Organisation of African Unity's Liberation Committee." *South African Historical Journal* 70, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 152-67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2018.1430846>.
- Sentry, The.** "Artful Dodgers," 2021. <https://thesentry.org/reports/artful-dodgers>.
- . "Overt Affairs," 2020. <https://thesentry.org/reports/overt-affairs>.
- Szalontai, Balázs.** *Kim Il Sung in the Khrushchev Era: Soviet-DPRK Relations and the Roots of North Korean Despotism, 1953-1964.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.
- Winrow, Gareth M.** *The Foreign Policy of the GDR in Africa.* Cambridge Russian, Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511559334>.
- Young, Benjamin R.** "An Emotional Relationship: Trust, Admiration, and Fear in North Korea-Zimbabwe Relations, 1976-1988." *S/N Korean Humanities* 4, no. 2 (2018): 129-49.
- . *Guns, Guerillas, and the Great Leader: North Korea and the Third World.* Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021.
- Yu, Chong-Ae.** "The Rise and Demise of Industrial Agriculture in North Korea." *The Journal of Korean Studies* 12, no. 1 (2007): 75-109.



# Acknowledgments

*The North Korea Economic Forum (NKEF) Policy and Research Paper Series on the North Korean Economy is a product of the Forum's annual conference on "Ideology and Economic Policy in North Korea" (Oct. 14~15, 2021). The conference and NKEF Policy and Research Paper Series have been made possible by generous support from the KDI School of Public Policy and Management.*

*This series analyzes issues and developments related to the North Korean economy, offering contributions that are relevant for both academic audiences and policy specialists. Papers within this series will cover a broad range of relevant topics, from North Korean economic history to North Korean foreign trade and the impact of sanctions, to the dynamic interactions between markets and central planning in North Korea. Prospective authors who wish to publish in this series should contact the editor.*



**The George Washington University  
Institute for Korean Studies**  
1957 E St., NW, Suite 503R  
Washington, DC 20052  
202.994.2775  
gwiks@gwu.edu

