

Transboundary Nature Cooperation – Protection of Wetlands in the DPR Korea

Seoul Office



Nature knows no manmade borders. This becomes particularly obvious if migratory birds are crossing the border at the demilitarized Zone between North and South Korea. HSF Korea supports the protection of migratory bird habitats, and is hereby connecting people.

CHALLENGES

North Korea is of great importance due to its central location on the „East-Asian Australasian Flyway“, the most important flight route of migratory birds in East Asia. The Yellow Sea bordering the west coast of North Korea is a bottleneck on this route. In the past 50 years, 66% of intertidal wetlands in the Yellow Sea have been lost and concurrent a significant share of resting places for migratory birds. Without a sustainable conservation of North Korean intertidal wetlands, endangered species such as the spoonbill sandpiper are likely to become extinct in the near future. At present, their population is declining by 26% per year. Wetlands also provide a wide range of services for humans. They regulate water quantity, groundwater recharge, and can contribute to regulate floods and the impacts of storms. Wetlands are also an important source of food, for example through fishery.

However, North Korea is also one of the most isolated countries on earth. While globalization has created bridges between many places - often also between formerly hostile states - the DPR Korea remained isolated. Thus, environmental information was collected and shared worldwide, while at the same time North Korea was a black spot on the map of scientific data for a long time.

Now a paradigm shift is taking place. The fact that environmental protection only works on a transboundary basis is accepted and can be seen on the fact that there is now an increased political focus on the environmental sector in



During a study trip to Mongolia a North Korean delegation observed the ringing of white-naped cranes.

North Korea. However, administrative obstacles as well as political differences often prevent successful cooperation with international actors in the environmental sector. The Hanns Seidel Foundation has been working in North Korea for almost 15 years, and since 2009 it has been increasingly active in the field of environment. It is an ideal platform for international exchange and cooperation - despite often unbreakable political differences.

A better understanding of wetlands and their sustainable use is a prerequisite for the accession of North Korea to the Ramsar Convention.

Kim Jong Chol, Department of Foreign Economic Relations of the Ministry of Land and Environment Protection (MoLEP)



Wetlands are beneficial for humans, e.g. as a protection from flooding or as a food source for the rural population.



During events in North Korea and neighbouring countries, e.g. in China and Mongolia, joint strategies for the protection of wetlands in Northeast Asia are developed.

APPROACHES

The Hanns Seidel Foundation has been trying to bring the actors in North Korea, especially the North Korean Ministry of Environment and Land Protection, together with representatives of international organizations and national governments. At the same time, trainings in the DPR Korea and abroad, conferences and practical environment surveys in North Korea are being conducted to improve the expertise of decision-makers in the environmental sector.

This shall not only be beneficial for the environment, but primarily for the local population in North Korea. For this reason, a large part of the projects is also focusing on the question how people can benefit from the conservation of wetlands. Between the conflicting priorities of economic development and environmental protection, the improvement of the living conditions of the local population is most important.

Through pilot projects in the country the awareness for the links between environmental protection, the improve-

ment of the living conditions of the rural population and sustainable development has been raised. This becomes particularly obvious in the Rason Special Economic Zone where the management and marketing of the local Rason Migratory Bird Reserve is being included in the planning and strategies of political actors and combined with the focus on economic development.

IMPACT

The initiated exchange with international actors in the field of environment as well as the participation of North Korean researchers in international events have already led to an increased collaboration of researchers in the region. It is also intended to achieve a long-term integration of North Korea into international agreements, such as the United Nations Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

In the years ahead, the Hanns Seidel Foundation Korea is going to continue this path consistently. The reintegration of North Korea in the environmental sector is a great opportunity to find a way of cooperation despite political differences, that brings people closer together and allows cooperation across borders. In 2016, the HSF Korea became a partner of the East Asian Australasian - Flyway Partnership, due to its commitment to transboundary cooperation. The partnership consists of 15 national governments in Northeast Asia as well as international organizations and NGOs. North Korea is also interested in a dialogue with the EAAFP Secretariat and a potential membership is under discussion.

The North Korean Ministry of Environment has already been involved in the formulation of regional environmental strategies during international workshops. This could be institutionalized through the long-term integration into international conventions and networks. ■

OUR PARTNERS



East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership



Birds Korea

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