

Abstract

North Korea is being considered one of the poorest countries, but the supporting evidence is insufficient. According to the recent evidence, the standard of living in North Korea is higher than that of the previous common perception. The new evidence is "Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)" conducted by Statistics North Korea in 2017 supported by UNICEF. Data about living standard, such as household assets, residential environment, and nutritional status of infants were collected in 2017 MICS, which enable to compare the living standard with that of other developing countries as the same categories of data for other developing countries are available.

It should be verified that how precisely 2017 MICS data reflect the reality of North Korea. As the data were collected by Statistics North Korea, there could be a serious bias in the collected data even though it was supported by UNICEF. However, the figures about the household assets retention rate reported in 2017 MICS are realistic by looking at the durable consumption goods export record to North Korea from Chinese trade statistics. It seems that the electricity utilization rate is significantly increased, as the power plant equipment import is drastically increased. In addition, residential environment data is more realistic than that of 2008 population census and 2014 social and demographic health survey (SDHS). The nutritional status of infant data is even more trustworthy as it is the measured data, such as height and weight.

According to the international property index developed by the Global Data Lab researchers, North Korea's index is far less than that of the upper-middle level of developing countries, far higher than that of the poorest countries, and around the same level with the average of the lower-middle level of developing countries or slightly less than it. Asset inequality is also similar to that of the regular lower-middle level of developing countries. As one might expect, the asset disparity between Pyongyang or affluent region and the rest region is huge, but this pattern is not North Korean specific, but general pattern all across the regular developing countries and lots of them have more serious asset inequality.

The nutritional status can be concluded similarly. The nutritional status of North Korea is upper-middle level among other developing countries in terms of the undernourished infant proportion. In other words, it is estimated that relative level of nutritional status is higher than that of the household asset. Similar to the household asset, there are regional and class disparities in nutritional status, these disparities are commonly observed in other developing countries as well. As a result, this report implies that the North Korea may not be one of the poorest

countries and the most unequal countries in the world, which contradicts to our common sense.

Keywords: North Korea, living standard, household assets, residential environment, nutritional status