

## **Micro-projects and Development in Mongolia**

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### Introduction

In 2007, The World Bank Mongolia office initiated its Mongolia Development Marketplace (MDM) program. The Development Marketplace is the World Bank's competitive grant program that provides financial support for the implementation of small, creative, effective and replicable projects. The program's primary goal is to support creative and innovative solutions to the most pressing social and economic concerns of our time and to expand and replicate successful models. Thirty seven projects out of 190 finalists were selected for awards up to US\$10,000. Nearly 2000 proposals were submitted for the initial stage of the MDM from across the country, seeking to find ways to provide better social services for the poor and vulnerable groups in urban and rural areas of Mongolia.

While the World Bank points out that the MDM is based on the model of its global competitive grant program, its success in Mongolia is also founded on pioneering work carried out by DANIDA, UNDP and UNESCO ten years earlier. This project, concerned with human rights and democracy as well as development, had a wider remit than the MDM programme, but the methodology that was initially disseminated through 36 communities across the country, appears to have had a positive impact a decade later.

At the MDM opening ceremony, **James W. Adams**, Vice President of the World Bank East Asia and Pacific Region, said that:

*“Mongolia had more number of participants and the per capita largest response for any Development Marketplace held across the World Bank. This is remarkable and shows the passion of Mongolians for change.”*

**Prime Minister of Mongolia M. Enkhbold**, said that

*“Many Mongolians and community groups have gained experience in writing proposals and putting their ideas in the paper. Also winners will contribute in their communities' development through the grants.”*

Nearly half of the initial proposals were from rural Mongolia and their ideas focused on how to improve services in education, health and environment issues as well as water, sanitation, energy, Information and Communication Technology. The projects were evaluated with five equally important criteria: innovation, impact and result on poor and vulnerable groups, cost effectiveness/realism, sustainability and potential for scaling up, and replicability.

In 1997, **Alan Middleton** was funded by UNDP to carry out training on micro-project design, development and implementation as a contribution towards the UNESCO/DANIDA project on Human Rights, Democracy and Development in post-Soviet Mongolia. This involved training trainers in participatory methods for designing micro-projects, selecting projects for funding and monitoring their

implementation. Seventy two projects in thirty six communities in urban and rural Mongolia were supported. More importantly, the methodology was imbedded and disseminated beyond these initial communities.

A fundamental assumption of the project was that economic development cannot lead to a better and happier life for all without regard to civil and political rights and that the corollary is also true: namely, that civil and political rights cannot be realised without access to fundamental social and economic standards such as access to education, health, employment and a decent quality of life. The project used those basic human rights which are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948) but extended this framework to include the international human rights standards which have been developed over the past 50 years, including those which are targeted at specific groups such as women, children, the disabled and other vulnerable groups. The social, economic and cultural rights include: the right to work, the right to social security (including medical care, sickness benefit, maternity benefit, old age benefits, invalidity benefits, employment injury benefits, unemployment benefits, family benefits), the right to leisure, the right to an adequate standard of living, the right to family life including rights of mother and child and the protection of the family, the right to adequate standards of health, the right to education, and the right to participate in cultural life.

The basic criteria for selection of micro-projects for funding were that they should be:

- Participatory
- Feasible
- Sustainable
- Replicable

They should also have:

- Clarity of outputs
- Other community benefits
- A local resource contribution
- A realistic time-scale for implementation

A fuller description of the UNESCO/DANIDA project can be found elsewhere on this web site. Although it was a decade ago, its methodology is clearly still valid for micro-level development that responds to the immediate needs of poor communities and vulnerable groups. It was initially replicated by UNDP in Mongolia and variations on the methodology have been implemented by the UNESCO/DANIDA programme in Ecuador, Bolivia and Indonesia. Its success in Mongolia as a methodology for *micro-development* makes it worth stressing the importance of *human rights* and *participatory methods* in the original project.

### Human Rights in Post-Soviet Mongolia

At the beginning of the project in 1997, community leaders participated in human rights training in Ulaanbaatar. This was important for getting the support of the local authorities in the areas where the project was to be implemented and these community leaders introduced human rights issues to the communities when they returned.

Knowledge about social development, participatory methods and the design and development of micro-projects was cascaded down from national and international

trainers to United Nations Volunteers (UNVs), who in turn trained those involved in micro-project design in the participating communities. At the same time, it was generally the case that the governors passed on information about the rights and responsibilities of the community in the micro-project formulation and implementation, encouraging them to see it as their project and emphasising the need to participate from the beginning. Three day workshops on human rights and micro-project design led to up to 20 people in each community having an understanding of the relationship between human rights and development at the local level. After these people had developed drafts of micro-project proposals, they were taken to the community forums for discussion with the whole community, and this knowledge was passed on to the communities through discussion of the importance of human rights for the project funders, UNESCO/DANIDA. Those who attended the training were able to articulate the meaning of human rights and, through discussion of the micro-projects, this understanding was passed on.

In the design phase of the micro-projects, therefore, the issue of human rights was thoroughly discussed, but particularly when they were discussing the ‘purpose’ of a micro-project and elaborating its aims and objectives. When offering broad descriptions of the micro-projects, these were elaborated around human rights issues. In selecting micro-projects for funding, prioritising projects revolved around whether the projects were important for the development of the community and important for human rights in particular.

The decisions about which project would be funded were made by a technical committee (the Ad Hoc Committee), for whom meeting the human rights criteria was a fundamental issue. On returning to the communities, the UNVs had to explain why certain projects were not funded and once again there was considerable discussion of the importance of human rights, how this was linked to community development and why, in particular, private enterprise projects were *not* funded. Some UNVs also carried out capacity building for NGOs operating in participating Aimags, thereby training another section of civil society who would in turn offer training to members of their organisations.

The dissemination of information about human rights has clearly been one of the most important results from the project. A booklet on human rights, which was used for the initial training, was developed into a more user-friendly form, suitable for training in the rural areas. Three thousand copies were delivered to the communities which participated in the project and other communities, delegates to conferences, students of human rights in the university and NGOs in the field. On a number of occasions during a later evaluation of the impact of the project, people who have been associated with the project confirmed that prior to the UNESCO/DANIDA intervention there was little understanding of the meaning of human rights. The above activities succeeded in promoting, generating and disseminating “knowledge and practices of civic, political, economic social and cultural rights at the community level in six aimags”.

### Participatory Methods

The transfer of knowledge about participatory methods was linked to the development of democratic practice and to the realisation of the priority needs of local communities, as identified by them. In the period of transition from a command system to a democratic society, local democratic institutions were still undeveloped. At the start of the project, the community forums, which should have met every three months were, in most cases,

moribund. The evidence from the project evaluation is that this changed dramatically. As passive recipients of information in the previous period, the communities had been encouraged “to receive” from above, rather than “to do” for themselves. During the project, attendance at meetings increased, as did the number of meetings which were called. The re-invigoration of the community forums as democratic institutions has, from all accounts, led to a realisation on the part of these communities that with a little support, they are capable of participating in democratic decision-making which results in improvements in the quality of their lives.

The people of the communities were provided with training which taught them how to design, develop and implement micro-projects. As a result, they listed their problems, identified their needs, prioritised these needs, elaborated purposeful aims and objectives for micro-projects, identified outputs in a number of human rights and development dimensions, worked out budgets, and developed time-scales for their programmes of work. This participation left the communities with new knowledge and their participation in decision-making in this way was an entirely new approach for the people of the communities who took part. When micro-projects were not supported, either by the communities themselves or by the Ad Hoc Committee, there was full and frank discussion of the reasons at the community meetings and, by and large, an acceptance of the outcomes.

For the most part, local authority Governors and officials supported this development of participatory democracy. Some Governors originally felt that they should have been given the funding, that their ideas of what the communities needed should have been accepted, and that therefore their pet projects should have been implemented; but this only occurred in a small minority of cases and in the end this initial resistance appears to have given way to a situation whereby the local authorities support the initiatives and the processes.

#### Micro-project design and implementation

The transmission of knowledge about micro-project design and implementation has its own rewards. Not only did it result in projects on the ground in all but one of the communities that participated, but it also encouraged a number of communities to use the methodology to obtain funding from other sources. Several communities produced and presented micro-projects to other international donors and have been successful. In two communities, for example, the installation of a computer and printing facilities in the offices of a governor immediately led to the development of five new micro-projects, two of which were funded. In another, a micro-project, which was rejected as being unsuitable for the UNESCO/DANIDA Project, was reformulated with a more realistic budget and funded by the national Poverty Alleviation Programme.

Through the transmission of the above types of knowledge, the project had a major impact at a number of levels. Clearly there was capacity building at the local level, both for the project teams who were most directly involved in the design and implementation of the micro-projects and for those who attended the community forums. In addition, there were cases such as the schoolteacher who went on to train 10 other teachers in her school, who in turn taught their classes about human rights and micro-project formulation as important aspects of their futures. However, the project has also offered capacity

building for community and local authority leaders, who have been instrumental in encouraging other Governors to replicate their experience. In addition, the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) reported that, in their project on self-governance training for local authority Governors, they encountered Governors who had participated in the UNESCO/DANIDA project who displayed considerable knowledge about human rights, participation and democratic governance and who discussed the impact of the project in these respects.

## **Conclusion**

We would argue that the success of the MDM programme in Mongolia can be traced back to these UNESCO/DANIDA roots. The number of participants referred to by James Adams and the experience in writing proposals mentioned by the Prime Minister, have antecedents in the 1997 project. This earlier work was wider in its scope, seeking to embed an understanding of human rights and democracy in a post-Soviet situation, but the micro-project methodology has been shown to be resilient as a development tool.