

Connection between Ecology and Economy

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The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking we used when we created them.¹

-Albert Einstein

Nature-Dependent Country

The land of Mongolia has a long history of nomadic civilization. Our nomadic ancestors followed a traditional way of life, journeying with livestock, living in yurts, moving from one place to another, seeking the pasture that was not devastated by summer droughts, harsh winter snows and overgrazing. They adapted to every changing season. Nearly half of all Mongolians still live outside urban areas in gers, or simple wood or daub homes, many in remote rural areas that are accessible only by rough tracks. Water must be carried from the nearest river, lake, spring, or well, and wood or dried dung must be collected and prepared as fuel for heating and cooking. The main source of livelihood is herding the five types of domestic animals: horses, cattle, camels, sheep, and goats, which roam freely in the unfenced countryside.

Mongolians have preserved a traditional nomadic culture, which is valued by all Mongolians who have a real desire to keep the balance of a safe and supportive environment for future generations.

Nomads, who can see the naturally unbalanced situation of today's world, are not rude or weak, but they understand the tight correlation between nature, its resources, and economic and human development. Because of the closeness of nature and human life, the environment was preciously respected by our nomadic forefathers and the wisdom of nature protection was passed down to the rising generations. Therefore, BogdKhan Mountain Strictly Protected Area, which is close to Ulaanbaatar City, is considered the first ecologically nature-reserved place in the world.

How Does Ecology Connect with Economy?

Even in the early twentieth century, ecological conservation was regarded as the protection of nonrenewable resources that were at the edge of devastation, but hardly anyone was remotely interested in or concerned about environmental conservation or the degradation of natural resources. The negative effects of environmental degradation are now being witnessed and have become more noticeable since the second half of the twentieth century. There has especially been growing concern about the impact of human activity on the physical environment of our world. Today, it is not only protection, but also the issue of ecological conservation, that has become the most decisive and influential factor for economic growth and social security.

As an example of this, the price of wool is progressively increasing in the world market. As a result, Mongolian herders want to raise more goats, which produce high quality cashmere, than sheep, whose wool is low quality. This is the economic side. Seeing this from the ecological side, while it is beneficial to raise our country's exports, the increasing number of

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¹ The Quotations Page. Available: <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/23588.html>

goats is having a harmful effect on the sustainability of nature in Mongolia. According to experts, having a balance between sheep and goats is very important and the balance is often estimated as proper when one third of the total small livestock is goats. The national census statistics for the number of livestock in 2005 showed that, "the total number of goats in 1991 exceeded sheep by 5,249, whereas in 2005, the number of excess goats was 13,267".²

This connects to the environment because goats have bad eating habits, overgrazing and cutting off the roots of flowers, grass, and plants. As a result, the areas that are exploited by goats are no longer nourished and are covered by useless vegetation, which increases the number of patients who have an allergy to waste plants. Then it becomes a social development issue as well as a problem of human health and security.

If something is sustainable, it is supposed to be able to continue in its present form. If development is sustainable, both economic growth and ecological conservation must be considered as inseparable parts of the development locomotive, like a car, which cannot be operated when it does not have enough fuel to move.

Hence, it is impossible to separate economic development issues from environment issues. Many forms of development can demolish the environmental resources upon which they must be based, and environmental degradation can oppress economic development and human security.³

In recent years, Mongolians see that the biggest problems that our country is facing are those issues that cause conflict between economic growth and environmental conservation. For example, there is air pollution, the half nomadic lifestyle and its poor living conditions, a lack of balance between goats and sheep, governmental destabilization, poisoned water due to mining chemical substances, and desertification. The statistically "unrealistic" numbers that are created by political pressure make it a tougher challenge.

While statistics say that Mongolia's economy is growing by 5% every year, there is no improvement in people's lives.⁴

According to the joint report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Asian Development Bank (ADB), released on October 16, 2006, while the Asia and the Pacific region were on track to achieve most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), Mongolia had the lowest score on the MDG progress index, and also had a negative score on the MDG status index. Mongolia had also regressed in its results on the MDG indicators of proportion of population below US\$1 per day, prevalence of underweight children under five years of age and net enrolment ratio in primary education. It also had recorded an

² Mongolian National Statistical Office. 2005. *Statistical Year Book of Mongolia*. Ulaanbaatar. Available: <http://www.statist.mn/yearbook/2005/yearbook2005.pdf>

³ United Nations. World Commission on Environment and Development. 1987. *Our Common Future*. Available: <http://ringofpeace.org/environment/brundtland.html>

⁴ Distelhorst, Luke. 2006. 6 Nov. *All People's Congress Focuses on Governance and Minerals*. Available: <http://www.moninfo.org/content/view/341/8/lang,en/>

ongoing downward trend since the 1990s in one of the MDG main indicators: the proportion of population with access to improved water resources in urban and rural areas.⁵

Urban sprawl, coupled with a demand for wood to build homes and to use as heating and cooking fuel, is slowly reducing the Mongolian forests. This destruction of the forests has also lowered river levels. More people die annually from air-pollution-related illnesses like respiratory diseases, lung cancer and bronchitis. Air pollution is becoming a serious problem, especially in Ulaanbaatar City. At the top of the Zaisan Memorial on a ridge over city, a depressing layer of dust and smoke from the city's three thermal power stations can be seen in three different colored levels. This layer is often appalling in winter, when all homes are continuously burning fuel and the power stations are working overtime.⁶



Source: E-Mongol.com. Sunset, Smoke, Suburb of UB. Available: <http://www.e-mongol.com/images/Sun%20set.%20smoke.%20suburb%20of%20UB.jpg>

Moreover, the exploitation of the land can directly activate the process of desertification. Desertification in Mongolia has also been noticed internationally. Apart from natural factors, human-caused problems have contributed to the increase of desertification throughout East Asian countries, including Japan, People's Republic of China, and Republic of Korea.

In addition to those environmental and human development problems, inefficient government bureaucracy, inadequate infrastructure, corruption, excessive tax rates, regulation and lack of access to financing are all concerns. According to the 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index Survey of Transparency International ratings, Mongolia was ranked:

As the 15th worst out of 26 Asian nations, even though Mongolia is one of only five Asian countries to sign the UNDP's convention against corruption.⁷

⁵ Binderiya, D. 2006. 17 Oct. Mongolia slow in achieving MDG target. *Moninfo*. Available: <http://www.moninfo.org/content/view/301/5/lang,en>

⁶ Legend Tour. General Information About Mongolia. Available: <http://www.legendtour.ru/eng/mongolia/info10.shtml>

⁷ Distelhorst, Luke. 2006. 7 Nov. Mongolia's Corruption Ranking Falls in 2006 Survey. *Moninfo*. Available: <http://www.moninfo.org/content/view/344/8/lang,en/>

Under the World Bank's research done in 2005, the authority's capacity has reduced dramatically year by year. The Mongolian government's capacity is at the same level as it was in 1992.⁸

Experts and economists, even Mongolian nationals, have determined that the main cause of the abstract economic growth is the mining sector, one of the most dynamic sectors of the Mongolian economy, which makes up 70% of exports,⁹ almost half of which are dominated by foreign companies because the authorities are looking after their own interests, not the nation's and not the environment's.

Recently, it was reported that:

In Bayanhongor province, one family's 64 goats died drinking poisoned water from the lake in which a Chinese mining company was using chemical substances for washing extracted gold without any special permission of local authority.¹⁰

At first sight, this reduced the number of goats, but behind that, one family lost its main source of livelihood; moreover, the lake was polluted. Also, it shows the Government's unconsidered and uncontrolled laws and regulations.

The Government's stability is necessary for the country's sustainable development. But in the last few years, the incomprehensible situation of the political parties and an unstable government has decreased the number of foreign investors and reduced loans from "US\$60 million in 1995 to US\$20 million in 2005" (footnote 9).

The investment climate in Mongolia needs to allow the private sector to be confident enough in the framework of Mongolia and supportive enough for not only domestic but also international investors.¹¹

Reforms for greater accountability in the Government and more stringent legislation for the country's vast mineral wealth are needed to attract greater numbers of foreign investors.

We should keep the mineral resources correctly for the future. That is a good way to improve the current economic condition, and furthermore, how Mongolia can improve its economy.¹²

These problems are not only seen in our country, but they can also be commonly seen in many developing countries.

⁸ Distelhorst, Luke. 2006. 6 Nov. All People's Congress Focuses on Governance and Minerals. *Moninfo*. Available: <http://www.moninfo.org/content/view/341/8/lang,en/>

⁹ Bulgamaa, B. 2006. 9 Nov. Mongolian Economy at Risk with Minerals. *Moninfo*. Available: <http://www.moninfo.org/content/view/351/35/lang,en/>

¹⁰ *Today*. 2006. 2 Nov. Goats poisoned from the lake water were compensated.

¹¹ Goldbeck, Brian. 2006. 20 Sep. Quoted in D. Binderiya, We need Further Investment Stability says NAMBC. *Moninfo*.

¹² B. Bulgamaa, B. 2006. 9 Nov. Mongolian Economy at Risk with Minerals. *Moninfo*. Available: <http://www.moninfo.org/content/view/351/35/lang,en/>

Conclusion

People's changing perception of the environment and the further development of globalization throughout our planet are both having a profound effect on our ability to maintain a balance between development and the environment. From the time sustainable development was first approved at the United Nations General Assembly in 1987, the issue has been discussed in many of the world's summits and conferences. But we need actions, not just verbal commitments.

To build sustainable development, we need not only intergovernmental dialogues, but the participation of every individual, every youth, and environmentally educated world citizens. The truth is that today's youth will face more problems than we have already. The best way to reduce all of those problems as a mean of sustainable development is environmental education. Environmental education is important to build sustainable development.

All people need to understand their connections to the natural world and to other humans, know where products and services come from and where wastes go, know how to measure and minimize their ecological footprint and face the future with hope and confidence. Our ecological footprint is invisible to most of us. We must make the invisible "visible".¹³

Young people today are living in the most turbulent time in the history of humankind, in which changes are taking place at a rate never before experienced. This is the world in which youths are approaching adulthood and it is they who will be shouldering a large proportion of the burdens of change.¹⁴

Einstein once said, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking we used when we created them" (footnote 11). Therefore, creating a more sustainable future through protecting our environment and keeping economic growth is within our reach.

As the youth of developing countries, we have great potential to contribute our efforts and active participation to create a more equitable and peaceful society. In that role, I believe we can build a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable world. We are in the best position to encourage our friends and to show our accomplishments to the rest of the world.

I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream.¹⁵

-Martin Luther King

¹³ National Council for Science and the Environment. 2003. *Third National Conference on Science, Policy and the Environment*. Available: http://www.ncseonline.org/ncseconference/2003conference/page_fid=2461.cfm

¹⁴ UNICEF. 2004. *Creating a Culture of Participation: Voices of Mongolian Adolescents Telling the UN Story*. Available: http://www.unicef.org/mongolia/Final_TUNS_6_2_04_no_logos_.pdf

¹⁵ King, Martin Luther King. *The I Have a Dream Speech*. The U.S. Constitution Online. Available: <http://www.usconstitution.net/dream.html>