



Mongolia: Small Infrastructure Investments Improve Lives of Ger Area Women

Lack of safe water supply, heating, and sanitation; and poor access roads to schools, markets, and health facilities limit mobility and increase time burdens, particularly for women, in ger areas of two large cities, Ulaanbaatar and Erdenet.



A multitude of positive gender impacts are possible, even from small infrastructure investments.

Some 60% of people in Mongolia now live in urban areas. An estimated 330,900 or 46% of total households are in ger or unplanned urban settlements that lack basic services. Lack of safe water supply, heating, and sanitation; and poor access roads to schools, markets, and health facilities limit mobility and increase time burdens, particularly for women, in ger areas of two large cities, Ulaanbaatar and Erdenet.

How to provide ger areas with water, roads, schools, and access to markets

The ADB-supported Mongolia Urban Development Sector Project (UDSP) attempted to respond to some of these challenges by providing roads and water supply to eight ger areas across the country. A project Gender Action Plan (GAP) helped to identify gender issues and ensure direct gender benefits, such as:

- improved water supply, access, and time savings particularly for women, children, and students, through investments in water kiosks;
- improved safety, security and mobility within ger areas and services, such as schools, and
- the creation of employment opportunities for women, which will continue beyond the life of the project.

“Assessment of and planning for gender issues up front helped to ensure the achievement of the multitude of positive gender impacts which are possible, even from small infrastructure Investments,” says Tuul Badarch, senior project officer at ADB’s Mongolian Resident Mission.

Provision of water supply to households, schools, and kindergartens

The project installed 58 new water kiosks and refurbished 33 water kiosks, which provide direct gender benefits in the form of immediate, adequate, potable, safe and more accessible water to 41,611 households in five project areas with 135,370 residents, 51% of whom are female.

Women are primarily responsible for retrieving water for households. Previously, ger area residents had to wait, sometimes many hours, for water trucks to arrive. There was often a shortage of water. With the new and refurbished project kiosks, a continuous supply of water is now available, and the time burden for accessing water has been reduced.

In Erdenet, 65% of ger residents now have access to safe drinking water within 200 meters of their homes, compared to the baseline of 45% in 2010.

A female resident of Bagh Rashaant, where a water kiosk was completed in December 2013, said, “The time I spend walking to collect water is now about ten minutes in total for one trip. The time is now reduced by about 50%.” Residents may make several trips a day to collect water.

“The safer water kiosks with its fewer transfer points also reduced risks of contamination,” said Munkhnairamdal, who

manages one of the kiosks. She said water is directly supplied to the kiosks through pumps and pipes.

Kindergarten children have also benefitted from the direct water supply provided by the project. At Erdenet Bagh No. 11 kindergarten, which has 140 students, teachers said, "Until May 2014, the water was delivered in water trucks and stored in large water drums outside. In winter, the water froze and the ice had to be broken and melted. Previously, much time was wasted waiting for the water trucks. The provision of water connections directly to the kindergarten has greatly enhanced the kindergarten facilities and has been more cost-efficient than water supplied by water trucks."

Economic empowerment for women

The GAP of the project provided for equal work opportunities for women. Nearly half or 39 of the 86 people who were employed at water kiosks, water reservoirs, pumping stations, and sewage treatment plants were women. They are now permanent employees of the Public Utility Service Organization (PUSO). The sound female employment numbers are partly due to the gender-friendly nature of the jobs, being both flexible and community-based, and located within short distances of the women's ger area homes. This latter feature is worth integrating into future projects - developing jobs for women that are close to their homes.

New road leads to building of new school

Thanks to a new ger area access road between her home in the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar and the new school, Oyunkhushing saves herself a few precious hours every day, as do hundreds of other female ger area residents. The trip to the school with her daughters now takes only ten minutes on foot.

"The new road has made my life so much easier," Oyunkhushing said. "Previously, I had to take both my daughters (one in kindergarten and the other in primary school) to school in downtown Ulaanbaatar. I have no car, so I had to either walk with them all the way to the junction on the dusty dirt road, or get an expensive micro-bus to the main junction, and then another bus to the school twice or thrice a day. Now, I just walk to and from the new school.

"Because of the new road that allows easy access to this outer ger area, the residential area has expanded in the last few years so that a new school was needed," she added. "They built the local school because of the good road."

ADB's investment in the road became a catalyst for the building of the government-funded school in 2012. Two female teachers, Enkhtsetseg and Ariunaa, said the number of students has grown rapidly from 600 to 1,050 (60% of them girls) between 2013 and 2014. "Previously, the children had to go to school in the downtown area. Now, there is a school right in the middle of their ger area," they said.

In Orbit Takhilt, Baruun Salaa, and Khailaast ger areas in Ulaanbaatar, three access roads, totaling 12.3 kilometers, have been built by the project with dedicated bus stations, street lighting, and safe pedestrian paths on both sides of the roads.

The old access road to Orbit Takhilt, which has a population of 27,144 or 7,540 households, was a dusty dirt road with no dedicated paths for walking. Several women interviewed said they had to walk down the unsafe and unlit road or take expensive micro-buses from the junction. Now, the more affordable public transport buses provided by the municipality, go all the way down to the end of the road where the last ger area residences are located. Female residents reported that they feel more secure as a result of the well-lit, dedicated walking paths.

A remaining feature of the project's GAP that will shortly be implemented is the microfinance component, which will enable 1,000 women from 1,000 ger area households to improve their on-plot facilities, including direct water connections. Female-headed and low-income households will be encouraged to apply for small loans. To help promote women's voice and legal representation, the GAP includes a gender target: at least 30% of loan and legal documents will require women as signatories or co-signatories.

"The approach taken in the UDSP is not a one-off effort," noted Wendy Walker, principal social development specialist at ADB's East Asia Department. "This project represents one of the first concerted efforts at gender mainstreaming with a gender action plan by ADB in Mongolia. Subsequent ADB urban projects focused on ger area development have built on the experience of the UDSP, and include GAPs that seek to positively strengthen the project impact on urban ger area populations, particularly for women."

Project Filters Out 25 Water Jobs for Women

In Erdenet ger area districts, 25 of the 26 new water kiosks are operated by women. Water vendors earn between \$130 to \$150 per month, higher than the national minimum wage of \$104 per month. The women vendors live in the ger areas and were happy to get jobs near their homes. Three female vendors interviewed were pleased with the working conditions as the new and refurbished kiosks were clean, comfortable, and most importantly had modern wood heaters installed by the project. The water vendors must have completed

secondary school and undergo special training in finance, kiosk management, health and hygiene, equipment care, occupational health and safety, among others, for them to be hired by the local Erdenet PUSO as contracted workers.

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