



Promoting Participatory Development in Mongolia: GUSIP

Following its transition from a socialist to a market-led economy in the 1990s, Mongolia has urbanised rapidly. The collapse of the traditionally nomadic livestock economy has triggered large scale migration to cities, particularly to the national capital Ulaanbaatar.

About half of Mongolia's population now lives in the Municipality of Ulaanbaatar (MUB). Other cities are much smaller by comparison. To accommodate its population of 1.3 million people, the size of Ulaanbaatar city has more than doubled to over 14,011 hectares since 1990.

This expansion is largely unplanned and haphazard. Informal neighbourhoods called *ger* areas have expanded in all directions. A *ger* is a round tent structure used by Mongolia's traditionally nomadic people. It is the most affordable form of housing available for migrants and low income residents. Over 60 per cent of the city's population live in *ger* areas; most of them are poor, jobless or under-employed.

In 2005, with technical support from UN-Habitat, the MUB prepared a grant proposal, *Ger-area Upgrading Strategy and Upgrading Plan (GUSIP)* focused on *ger* area upgrading and development in a consultative and coordinated manner. The Cities Alliance was approached for financial assistance with the project.

A Structured Consultation Process Begins

GUSIP was designed as a multi-year programme to provide technical and financial support for a *ger* area upgrading strategy and investment plan in order to redevelop, upgrade and manage Ulaanbaatar's *ger* areas in a participatory manner. It spelled out a framework to develop the *ger* areas through a structured consultative process led by the MUB.

The consultative process included a systematic assessment of development issues in the *ger* areas of Ulaanbaatar city. The key hurdles were the polarisation between formal

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urbanisation, achieved through central planning, and informal settlements; between Mongolia's policy of urban renewal, and incremental upgrading.

A consensus was found to classify the *ger* areas into three types: central, middle and peri-urban. Each has its own set of characteristics and development challenges. For instance, central *ger* areas are located near the city core and face a constant threat of eviction due to a rising demand for urban real estate; middle *ger* areas, located near the centre, have limited infrastructure and facilities; and peri-urban *ger* areas are characterised by low density with little or no access to basic urban infrastructure and services. Climate-related risks like flooding aggravated by a lack of drainage facilities and steep slopes were also identified.

At every stage, consultations were held with local government institutions such the *duureg* (district) and *khoroo* (sub-district) councils and the Mongolia Association of Urban Centres. Private sector agencies, civil society organisations, academic institutions and international aid agencies were consulted too. Over time, *ger* area communities joined the process as well.

“We cannot force people to do things they don't wish to do – but we can enhance awareness.”

T S Byambadorj, Resident of Ulaanbaatar who participated in a Community Planning Workshop on Flood Protection

These consultations led to a shared understanding among city stakeholders of the problems facing *ger* area residents. Various urban upgrading approaches were analysed and adapted, and area-specific strategic options and recommendations were formulated. Different guidelines were prepared for each of the three types of *ger* areas. Overall, the process helped identify possible solutions to sustainably improve the quality of life in *ger* areas.

Ulaanbaatar Embraces Change

In 2007, the **Citywide Pro-Poor Ger Area Upgrading Strategy of Ulaanbaatar City** was approved by the Ulaanbaatar Mayor's Council and adopted for implementation by the Ulaanbaatar City Citizens Representative Council. UN-Habitat's Human Settlements Officer Bruno Dercon, who managed the project in the final stages of implementation, says, "GUSIP set in motion a process of acceptance of the *ger* areas at the policy level. It changed the city's approach to *ger* area development. This is significant in Mongolia's complex political landscape." In 2009, the Government of Japan provided grant assistance of nearly USD 6 million to implement selective upgrading in middle-*ger* areas, managed through newly mobilised community organisations.

By inviting *ger* area residents to participate in community planning and development, GUSIP helped shape the role of the MUB as a facilitator rather than service provider. In 2010, the **Unur Area Flood Protection Community Action Plan** was developed after consultations with 60 residents from seven *khoroos* in the Unur area. Residents actively contributed to the formulation of priorities for vulnerability reduction and measures to deal with it. T S Byambadorj, who participated in the planning workshop, says, "We need to integrate flood protection into community action planning and through communal collaboration. We cannot force people to do things they don't wish to do – but we can enhance awareness."

Extensive research and data-gathering initiatives under the GUSIP programme have yielded a lot of previously undocumented information on Ulaanbaatar. For instance, by mapping *ger* areas an **urban poverty profile** was prepared, while multi-stakeholder working groups yielded an assessment of issues such as **service distribution, infrastructure, land planning and management***. Based on

the information gathered during the structured consultation process, practical guidelines, action plans and toolkits were also drafted and circulated in English and Mongolian. A wealth of data on Ulaanbaatar is now available and benefits academics, urban practitioners, city authorities and others interested in learning about the city.

Lessons Learned from the GUSIP Experience

The GUSIP programme helped Ulaanbaatar recognise the value of incremental upgrading as a viable alternative to costly urban renewal practices. For instance, sanitation and risk mitigation require measures starting at the household and plot level, while neighbourhood upgrading needs massive infrastructure investments. More public spaces, better roads and enhanced public facilities are still required, which entails land consolidation at a practical, though often limited, scale. At the same time, urban renewal in the city centre and along major new infrastructure networks remains an option.

While GUSIP did not lead to a complete overhaul of policies and governance in Mongolia, it has helped promote awareness and sensitised policy makers and implementers to the condition of people living in *ger* areas. Public awareness and understanding of the policies can further contribute to the GUSIP process. It can also potentially contribute to sustained people's participation. This is particularly important as *ger* area residents continue to seek technical support and financial resources to improve their areas. Changes in legislation, rules and regulations can help institutionalise participatory urban governance at the city and sub-city level and contribute to a more sustainable development strategy for Ulaanbaatar.

* All analytical reports, toolkits and other publications prepared as part of GUSIP can be accessed on the Cities Alliance website (www.citiesalliance.org)

The GUSIP project contributes to the objectives of the Cities Alliance by:

- Promoting pro-poor policies and projects at the city level
- Promoting local partnerships to address difficult city issues
- Mobilising financial investment from a range of international donor agencies