

# Mongolia

In the last two decades, Mongolia has experienced rapid political, economic, and social transformation, from a Soviet client state to a democratic, independent, market economy. A major priority now is to establish the conditions for sustainable and inclusive economic growth. The Asia Foundation is well positioned to help Mongolia meet these challenges, with programs to advance good governance, promote citizen participation, improve urban services in the *ger* areas, address environmental issues and challenges, empower women, and promote dialogue on regional cooperation.



## THE ASIA FOUNDATION IN MONGOLIA

In 1990, The Asia Foundation was the first non-profit organization to be invited into Mongolia, and we have played a unique role in the country's development since then. Our long-term, comprehensive approach, and record of programs have met important needs at critical junctures in Mongolia's recent history. The Foundation has earned a reputation as a neutral and credible partner that can work effectively with government, civil society, and the private sector. Now in the midst of an economic boom, the country is facing complicated new economic, social, and governance challenges. In response, the Foundation is collaborating with multiple stakeholders on key reforms to strengthen democratic governance and build a foundation for long-term economic prosperity. The Foundation's programs in Mongolia are built around four key themes:

1. Advancing democracy, good governance, and civic engagement
2. Addressing environmental challenges
3. Empowering women
4. Promoting dialogue on regional cooperation

## ADVANCING GOOD GOVERNANCE

Unique in a region of authoritarian regimes, Mongolia has a strong democratic foundation grounded in its 1992 constitution, and the basic institutional infrastructure of democratic governance is largely in place. But it remains an ongoing challenge to ensure that governing institutions maintain the will and the ability to implement existing legislation promoting transparency and accountability. There is increasing public concern that a lack of good governance may prevent faster and more inclusive economic growth, and public dissatisfaction with high levels of corruption is growing, along with growing income gaps and rising inflation.

At the national level, our Strengthening Transparency and Governance in Mongolia (STAGE) program supports government efforts to curb corruption and improve administrative reform, key steps to secure a level of good governance in Mongolia's burgeoning democracy and promote long-term sustainability of the country's economic growth, allowing the economy's benefits to reach all segments of society. The project builds on the previous Mongolia Anti-Corruption Support (MACS) project, implemented with USAID funding from 2005-2011. STAGE



### MONGOLIA

The Asia Foundation has been supporting programs in Mongolia since 1990, and has staffed a resident office in Ulaanbaatar since 1993.

Since 1990, the Foundation's book donation program has provided more than 750,000 books to over 4,000 Mongolian institutions and communities across the nation.

engages a wide range of stakeholders, from civil society organizations (CSOs) to high-level government agencies, including the Ministry of Justice, the Cabinet Secretariat, the General Prosecutors Office, the Independent Authority Against Corruption, and the Supreme Court.

In July 2011, Mongolia assumed the presidency of the Community of Democracies (CoD) from Lithuania, an office it will hold until July 2013. The Foundation is supporting Mongolia in its efforts to make the CoD more operational and action-oriented, and to promote regional cooperation, particularly across the Asian region. The Foundation will join with the Secretariat of the CoD to host a roundtable discussion as a follow-up to the International Women's Forum held July 7-9, 2012. We are also working with the Secretariat to organize a meeting launching the Asian Partnership Initiative for Democracy (APIID), including discussions of a potential merger with the Asia Pacific Democracy Partnership. Together with the Secretariat, the Foundation will conduct a Mongolian Democracy Case Study, train journalists to effectively report on CoD, and initiate a public outreach campaign to increase public awareness of CoD.

At the local level, our Fostering Civic Engagement at the Subnational Level (FOCE) program supports efforts by the President's Office to promote urban and rural governments that are democratic, empowered, and accountable to citizens, and which provide services responsively to citizens' needs. Through civic education, the Foundation works to increase citizen awareness of the functions and responsibilities of subnational governments. Local communities are encouraged to adopt more participatory policymaking practices, and to establish feedback mechanisms so citizens can express their satisfaction and their concerns.

As a result of rapid urbanization, nearly half of the population of Mongolia now lives in Ulaanbaatar, and large, unplanned, peri-urban settlements called ger districts have sprouted up in areas surrounding this and other major cities. These ger districts are isolated from the commercial activity of the city, and often lack water, electricity, waste management, transportation and other basic public services. Through a new Urban Services for the Ger Districts program, The Asia Foundation is improving access to services for residents of Ulaanbaatar's ger districts. The Foundation is working with the City Municipality to initiate short-term improvements, while devel-

oping long-term solutions including economic opportunities for ger district residents.

## EMPOWERING WOMEN

The Asia Foundation's programs seek to protect the rights and increase the economic opportunities of Mongolian women. For over a decade, we have been at the forefront of the fight against trafficking in persons for sexual and labor exploitation, providing our government and CSO partners with technical assistance and expertise to develop and adopt stronger legislation. The Foundation has conducted nationwide multi-media and public awareness campaigns and training programs to combat international trafficking. Our programs have supported initiatives resulting in better prevention, more rigorous investigation, and increased prosecution of human trafficking. In partnership with the Mongolian Women Lawyers' Association and other stakeholders, the Foundation supported passage of the landmark Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons in early 2012. This comprehensive, multidimensional approach reflects our broader strategy of mainstreaming gender issues across all of our programs.

Women's empowerment is essential to reducing poverty and promoting women's economic opportunities in Mongolia. Education is a vital path to empowerment for vulnerable and at-risk women. While access to education has improved for Mongolian girls, and they now exceed boys in tertiary education, women still face challenges in the job market and remain underrepresented in the political system. It is especially difficult for low-income young women, often from rural families, to obtain a university education. The Foundation is committed to improving access to education for underprivileged women in Mongolia, and over the past two years has



partnered with the Zorig Foundation to award scholarships to 120 low-income women from across the country, enabling them to pursue undergraduate degrees at two respected Mongolian universities. The scholarships are specifically awarded to young women pursuing degrees in the sciences, an area of study where women are especially underrepresented in Mongolia.



Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is still a key challenge in Mongolia, but reliable quantitative and qualitative data on the prevalence of GBV and related issues is missing. Together with a wide range of national stakeholders, the Foundation is implementing a landmark, comprehensive, nationwide study of GBV in Mongolia to inform policymaking and shape interventions to combat GBV. Based on internationally recognized research methodologies, this new project will assess the prevalence and public awareness of GBV in Mongolia, identify the root causes, analyze current policy to identify gaps and problems in implementation, and assess the quality and availability of GBV services.

#### **ADDRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES**



Although Mongolia is large and sparsely populated with just under three million people, it faces serious environmental challenges. This is true in both the remote countryside and the rapidly growing capital, Ulaanbaatar, which has become the primary destination of a massive urban migration. Major urban challenges include inadequate wastewater treatment and solid waste disposal, threatened water resources, and some of the world's worst air pollution. Elsewhere, priority issues include desertification, the effects of climate change,

groundwater that is diminishing in quality and quantity, and loss of biodiversity. A history of destructive practices in the mining industry due to a weak regulatory system with poor oversight. Excessive mine licensing and the activities of unregulated artisanal miners have caused widespread environmental disruption and soil and water pollution. While progress is being made toward mining sector reform, government institutions lack the capacity and resources to enforce regulations, and citizen participation in local resource management is still limited.

As mining grows in importance to Mongolia's economy, local communities and the environment will increasingly feel the impact. Effective government institutions and citizen participation in local resource decisions will be imperative. Since 2006, The Asia Foundation has promoted responsible mining in Mongolia by supporting collaboration between industry, government, and civil society. Working with local NGO partners in a growing number of communities affected by mining, the Foundation has helped to establish 17 local multi-stakeholder councils to improve management and environmental protection of local resources. Our program aims to develop responsible use of water and soil resources through multi-stakeholder engagement, and build knowledge by promoting community partnerships, public awareness campaigns, and training to encourage community involvement.

The program also includes developing initiatives to promote responsible artisanal mining, reducing conflict and environmental damage, introducing participatory tools to monitor natural resource use at the local level, and working with government agencies to coordinate the monitoring of soil and water resources. By assisting a national coalition of local environmental movements, the Foundation also strengthens environmental advocacy and conservation.

## PROMOTING DIALOGUE ON REGIONAL COOPERATION

Mongolia continues to pursue its “third neighbor policy” by strengthening its diplomatic relations and economic ties with the United States, the European Union, Japan, South Korea, and other Asian countries to counterbalance the powerful roles that Russia and China have long played in its affairs. While China and Russia still dominate Mongolia’s economy, the country is becoming increasingly active in international and regional frameworks in order to broaden its foreign rela-

tions and secure its place on the international stage. In cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Foundation is supporting Mongolia’s current two-year presidency of the Community of Democracies. Drawing on our well established and longstanding links with key government partners and CSOs, we are providing technical assistance to the Secretariat of Mongolia’s Presidency to facilitate the development of a democracy case study, a process for strengthening media engagement, and the identification of opportunities for regional cooperation.

### PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

**Corruption Benchmarking Surveys:** Conducted 11 semi-annual national corruption benchmarking surveys that assessed the scope, incidence, and impact of corruption at the household level over time. Household reports of incidents of bribery fell from a high of 28 percent of households surveyed in 2006, to eight percent in 2011.

**Local Multi-stakeholder Councils:** Established the first 17 local multi-stakeholder councils in mining-affected communities to help improve community engagement in responsible resource use at the local level.

**Environmental Education:** Trained dozens of school teachers in responsible resource use and integrated it into their schools’ training programs.

**Human Trafficking:** Reached an estimated 100,000 youth through multi-media and awareness campaigns to prevent trafficking across the country. The Foundation also supported advocacy for the passage of the landmark Law on Combating Trafficking in Persons, adopted in early 2012.

**International Women’s Leadership Forum:** In partnership with the Presidency of the CoD, The Zorig Foundation, MonAme, and the Scientific Research Center, The Asia Foundation organized an International Women’s Leadership Forum in Ulaanbaatar. U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton paid a visit to Mongolia to participate in the forum, and presented her keynote address on Mongolia’s efforts to build democracy and women’s leadership.

**Community Based-Mediation:** Established seven community mediation boards and training for dozens of mediators in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and Home Affairs.

**Girls Scholarships:** Provided 120 scholarships for young women to pursue science degrees at two top Mongolian universities.

*The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 17 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.*



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