

MONGOLIA HIGHLIGHTS

A Partner in Promoting Justice, Accountability and Prosperity in Mongolia

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT PROVES EFFECTIVE IN PROMOTING RESPONSIBLE MINING

Uguumur township in Toson Zaamar, the northwest corner of Tov province, hums with mining activity from dusk to dawn. Mining affects nearly everyone's life in this township, given that 80 percent of the 8,300 hectares of the territory has been licensed for exploration or extraction. In this village of about 3,300 people, 18 companies mainly owned by Mongolian, Russian and Chinese interests, actively mine placer gold deposits. This includes five major operations along the banks of the Tuul River, which is a shared water source for mining, town residents, and herders who depend upon the Tuul for watering their livestock. The quality and quantity of water in the Tuul River affects numerous people beyond those in Toson Zaamar, since the Tuul flows through Mongolia toward the Selenge River and Lake Baikal, the world's oldest and deepest lake containing nearly a fifth of the world's unfrozen freshwater reserve.

Although this is a boom town for mining, only 60 percent of the local working population is employed. Mining companies say it is difficult to find skilled local labor. Residents of Uguumur support the mines subject to certain conditions. One local resident named Ulziibayan expressed the situation as difficult, but not without hope:

"There is a lot of money at the mining companies, but we have no social safety net. There is no land left for livestock. Is there really a need to give all the land to mining licenses? If we could preserve some pasture and benefit from the mining activity through local development, we would be much better off."

-- Ulziibayan



Mining operations on the Tuul River through Uguumur.

Batbold of the Toson Zaamar-Tuul River Movement laid out the conditions: "We want to be engaged, employed, and for the companies to reclaim land when extraction is completed." These are the same conditions voiced by communities in Khentii, Hovsgol and other aimags where employment options are few.

With a vision that communities can benefit from mining, a group of local residents led by D. Enkhtur of the Toson Zaamar-Tuul River Movement is engaging with citizens, government and the mining companies to encourage responsible mining for the benefit of all Mongolians.

Community Council Formed and Agreement Signed

In March 2007, The Asia Foundation (TAF) sponsored a workshop on civic engagement and community mobilization organized by TAF's D. Kherlen and Ed Delhagen. The day after the event, 200 people from Toson Zaamar soum convened a meeting with local government officials to address pressing concerns. As a result of the meeting, residents formed a community council parallel to the Citizen Representative Hural to carry out public monitoring of government

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The Asia Foundation works with the public, private and non-governmental sectors to promote responsible resource use for the benefit of all Mongolian.

The Toson Zaamar – Tuul River Movement works closely with mining companies, government and civil society to promote responsible mining. Local mining companies have capitalized a "green fund," and the Movement hopes to open a center that will provide information to citizens.



Datsan Trade Company Chief Geologist Damdin proudly shows the company's land reclamation work.

and business activities. In addition, the meeting yielded a three-party agreement between citizens, government and mining companies to form a working group to focus on rehabilitating land, restoring watersheds, and promoting local community development.

Using citizen engagement tactics that were discussed at the workshop, the community council has made significant progress. Six companies have signed an agreement with the community council committing to voluntarily reforest areas and rehabilitate water sources within the district, in addition to required reclamation activities implemented at their mines.

Representatives of Datsan Trade Company, one of the mining companies that is party to the Uguumur agreement, expressed pride in their good community relations and ability to engage with civil society and government. As a result of dialogue with citizens and government, the Datsan Trade Company has made reclamation on its 185 hectare concession a priority. According to Chimeg, the Site Manager, "Datsan Trade Company activity affects local pasture and water, so we are trying to minimize our impact and concurrently reclaim land." The company has already conducted technical land reclamation on 54 percent of the land used.

Mining Information Center

As more citizens engage more actively with govern-

ment and business, a lack of easily accessible information is among the needs that has come to light. Local residents want to know about the mining companies that affect them, and about local government initiatives and decisions. Only with this information can locals effectively engage.

To address this need, the Toson Zaamar-Tuul River Movement is currently building an information center in Uguumur. The center will form an open hub that encourages businesses, government representatives and NGOs to share information. Fostering good relations with open and transparent information and activities, the center will provide a key building block for the development of responsible mining.

Greening Project

The Toson Zaamar-Tuul River Movement has proposed a Greening Project to reforest local areas. The initiative receives funding through a local community development fund. The reforestation project, slated to begin this fall, will benefit the community by protecting local water resources and by employing local residents, particularly those from vulnerable households.



Unreclaimed land at a mine site in Uguumur.

The Asia Foundation works with the Toson Zaamar-Tuul River Movement and the citizen-based Mongolian Nature Protection Coalition (MNPC) of which it is a part to provide technical assistance and conduct joint activities. The MNPC participates in The Asia Foundation-facilitated Multi-Stakeholder Process for Responsible Mining that brings mining companies, government and citizen groups together to promote responsible mining.