

COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION IMPACT EXAMPLE SERIES

MONGOLIA

ENGAGING GOVERNMENT PARTNERS

In rural communities across Mongolia, Mercy Corps' mobilization approach is helping civil society organizations (CSOs) engage local government groups as partners in solving community-identified priority issues. Several programs aim to strengthen the capacity and coordination of CSOs to provide better services to communities and to work more effectively with the government.

Learning mobilization strategies is one of the first steps for partner CSOs. Mercy Corps works with CSOs to support small community-led projects with four main objectives:

- to empower communities to undertake their own assessment of the issues and find solutions based on their own resources and capabilities;
- to involve community members in leadership of the project design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- to strengthen capacity of CSOs in the use of participatory approaches in community development; and
- to encourage involvement of the government at each stage of the process.

The Training, Advocacy and Networking for Stronger NGO Sectors (TAN) program was implemented in Mongolia and Guatemala from 2003 to 2008. In Mongolia, Mercy Corps' team defined community as 'local people, residents who live within specific geographical boundaries, who share common resources, cultural and societal values'. Not a homogeneous structure, but one that consists of different interest groups, individuals and relationships among them. Cross-visits helped people from the two very different TAN program countries compare approaches, share lessons and gain exposure to creative ideas.

The following project example helps bring to life the process and factors involved when community mobilization collaborates with government partners.

The Community Without Garbage

The *Blue Hill - Our Home* project set out to help community members in several nearby villages increase their knowledge about how to create a healthy environment and to become a model area for the district. The needs



CSO and street group members discuss the next steps of their awareness campaign.

Photo: Mandal Urtnasan/Mercy Corps, 2008

assessment showed that garbage removal was the biggest concern among citizens and the community identified cleaning up six unauthorized garbage dumps as the priority for action.

The local CSO *Women for Social Progress* designed a project proposal to work with citizens to improve the situation. The one-year project started by organizing villagers into 70 street groups, each one led by a community member responsible for participating in outreach and linking their group with the CSO and Mercy Corps' project team as well as other street groups. All the group leaders were trained on topics such as existing environmental laws and regulations, garbage management, group mobilization, and advocacy. This knowledge was then transferred to all households in the

villages through informal training sessions and door-to-door visits. As a result of this community-wide awareness, the CSO and street group leaders found community members willing to adopt newly introduced behaviors such as maintaining pit latrines and classifying garbage for recycling.

At all stages of the project, local government supported the initiatives of the project team. At the assessment stage, authorities were invited to a community event organized by *Women for Social Progress* and their 15-member CSO network. After the event, the district representative donated US\$4,000, a significant amount that allowed the project to rehabilitate an old building into a local development center, a need identified by the community. The space became the meeting place for the *Blue Hill - Our Home* project, hosting citizen meetings, trainings and information dissemination activities. During the project, community residents recall the district governor being involved like any other project team members. Reflecting on this process, Governor Ms. Erdenechimeg had these encouraging words: "Since the *Blue Hill - Our Home* project started its activities... citizens' motivation towards exchanging information, attending trainings and cooperating with each other has been improved considerably. For instance, when we organized (citizens') meetings in the past, only 60-70 people used to get involved in them, but now the meeting attendance is between 200-300 citizens."

The governor also appreciated the initiative of the project team to invite and involve government officials and civil representatives in the project meetings so they could report their work to the citizens. "This procedure is not a new thing, actually the elected authorities like the civil representatives are supposed to be present in the meeting and listen to the citizens. But in reality, they don't and we as a governing staff don't have initiative to invite them...now doing so is getting to be a regular habit for the authorities and citizens. Even other areas are learning from us and trying to use our experience in their work."

Like many projects, the "Blue Hills – Our Home" project encountered a number of constraints. There were only two garbage trucks operated by a private company and they often broke down or drivers refused to load garbage without good payment. Because of delayed transportation, the garbage that citizens had started to collect and classify was again filling the streets and citizens' motivation to maintain good practices was decreasing. The project team, fearful for the success of the project, met with relevant government officials several times and asked for a joint effort to solve the problem. The governor provided one garbage truck and at least one collection worker for each area in exchange for a small monthly fee from every household. Citizens saw the value of this service and before the project was complete, 100 percent of area households were paying the fee. Four of the six unauthorized dumps were also removed and community members mobilized to provide labor for maintaining the land.

MOBILIZATION TOOLS USED FOR COORDINATION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT:

- Rapid Assessment
- Action Planning meetings
- CAG Questionnaire potential project implications and government relationships
- Leadership Handover

This Community Mobilization Impact Example is one of a series included in Mercy Corps Guide to Community Mobilization Programming (2009). It was written by Munkhzaya Otgon and Oyunchimeg Dovdoi, Civil Society Project Officers, Mandal Urtnasan, Civil Society Director for Mercy Corps-Mongolia, with Ruth Allen, Global Advisor for Community Mobilization, Governance and Partnerships.

**You must be the change
you wish to see in the world.**

~ Gandhi



Be the change