

MONGOLIA'S JOURNEY TOWARD SUSTAINABILITY

By

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I. Organization and Structure

A. Establishment of the MNCSD

Mongolia actively participated in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit and became one of the first countries to adopt Agenda 21. In the mid 1990s, the National Development Board¹ (NDB) and the Ministry of Nature and Environment jointly formulated a project document, the Mongolian Action Program for the 21st Century (MAP 21), that then became the plan for a national Agenda 21. This plan received technical and financial support from UNDP's Capacity 21 Program. However, a month after the inception of the program in May 1996, the ruling Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party was replaced by a new government led by the Democratic Coalition. This new ruling government disbanded the NDB and created the Mongolian National Council for Sustainable Development (MNCSD) to serve as the executing agency for MAP 21.

B. Mandate and Role of the MNCSD.

The Mongolian MNCSD is an ad hoc committee set up by government resolution. The MNCSD's role is to guide and oversee formulation, planning and implementation of MAP 21. The council is not formally a part of government but derives power purely from its high-level membership. More recently, it has been strengthened by the addition of new members drawn from Standing Committees of Parliament, the private sector and NGOs. Nevertheless, the MNCSD would benefit from a more formal or better defined status vis-a-vis government.

The MNCSD initiated a two-year process to formulate a blueprint of a national strategy for sustainable development. This blueprint was developed through a continuous process of consultation among a wide spectrum of stakeholders at both national and local levels. MAP 21 outlines a strategy of holistic development that combines economic growth with social equity and the proper use of natural resources. The Action Program not only contains an assessment of current socio-economic and environmental conditions, but also defines national goals and priority areas, and suggests ways of achieving these goals and solving key problems. MAP 21 also draws upon local level action plans (AAPs) and future-modeling exercises carried out within the framework of the program. This process increased awareness of sustainable development among decision-makers, professionals and Mongolian society at large.

C. The MNCSD and MAP 21

The MNCSD is the lead institution managing the MAP 21 process. The Chairman of the MNCSD is the Prime Minister and the Secretary is the Cabinet Secretary. The MNCSD and the MAP 21 process are supported by a number of individuals and bodies. A Management and Coordination Working Group (MCWG) coordinates inputs from

¹_A government body responsible for the national development strategy and planning as well as coordination between ministries.

different ministries and government agencies. Four national consultants provide technical support on economics, social issues, gender and youth concerns. In addition, the UNDP is providing a full-time advisor on sustainable development issues working from the UNDP Country Office. Finally, an Advisory Committee comprised of leading national experts in relevant fields and civil servants from different ministries and NGOs carries out on-going work in eight specific technical areas. These technical advisors and advisory bodies all feed their work to MAP 21's Project Implementation Unit (PIU) which is simultaneously the MNCSD secretariat.

UNDP's Capacity 21 Program has provided considerable support by supplying technical assistance and staff to various aspects of the MAP 21 program and process. This support has included supplying the PIU with basic information on sustainable development issues, Agenda 21 lessons from other countries, and enabling MNCSD members to attend international and regional conferences on sustainable development, including the Rio +5 Conference.

The MAP 21 process has also had unprecedented involvement from local communities. Six months after the initiation of the MAP 21 process the MNCSD selected *Aimag*² Sustainable Development Advisors (ASDA). After two weeks of training at the Program Implementation Unit, the Aimag Advisors coordinated the preparation of Aimag Action Programs (AAPs), or local Agendas 21, in their respective provinces. These ASDAs also facilitated the creation of Economic, Social and Environmental Committees within each province to support the implementation of AAPs. These committees, established by the resolution of local parliament and composed of members of local government, local parliament, local and national NGOs and business representatives, are headed by provincial governors. Each of these committees is subdivided into three or four working groups that correspond to the four main pillars of Agenda 21: economic growth, social equity, environmental protection and civil society participation. See the Chart 1 below for a depiction of the overall organization of MAP 21.

Although officially, the MNCSD is a non-governmental ad hoc body, it consists largely of government leaders from the executive branch of government. In April 1998, the membership was expanded to include two representatives from civil society and leaders from Mongolia's parliament. The civil society members are drawn from the business sector and NGOs. NGOs have one seat that is rotated between different NGOs, and which is dependent on the MNCSD's agenda. A list of members follows (those added since 1998 are denoted with an asterisk).

² Administratively Mongolia is divided into 21 *aimags* that consist of *sums* which are composed of *bags* (the lowest administrative units).

Illustration: Organization of the MNCSD and MAP 21:

MNCSD
Chairman-Prime Minister

Cabinet Secretariat
Head – National Director of MAP 21,
Member of the MNCSD

**National Sustainable
Development Advisors**

**Management and
Coordination
Working Group**
Heads of Departments of
relevant Ministries and other
government
agencies

Advisory Committee
Working Groups of
experts, academics, NGOs
and private companies

MAP 21 PIU I.
National Coordinator of MAP
21, Secretary of the MNCSD

**Aimag Sustainable
Development Advisors to
Aimag Governors.**

**Economic, Social and
Environmental Committees**
Chairman – Aimag Governor
Members – local administration, aimag
parliament members, NGOs and private
sector.

MNCSD membership:

Chairman: Prime Minister
Vice-Chairmen: Finance Minister
Minister of Nature and Environment
Secretary: National MAP21 Coordinator

Members:

Minister of Health and Social Protection
Minister of Education
Minister of Infrastructure Development
Minister of Industry and Agriculture
Head of the Cabinet Secretariat (National Director of MAP 21)
Mayor of Ulaanbaatar City
Governor of Arkhangai Aimag (representing the Southern region)
Governor of Dornod Aimag (representing the Eastern region)
Governor of Khovd Aimag (representing the Western Region)
State Secretary of the Ministry of Finance
Head of the Department of International Organizations
Chair, Standing Committee on Social Policy, Parliament of Mongolia *
Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Rural Policy, Parliament of Mongolia*
Chair, Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Policy, Parliament of Mongolia*
Head of the National Business Council on Sustainable Development and Chair of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and the Market Research Institute*
NGO Representative*

II. MNCSD's Progress to Date

Given the complex and participatory process undertaken by the MNCSD what have been the fruits or accomplishments of this effort? The MNCSD's contributions lie mainly in three areas, which are discussed below.

** Fostering Broad Participation by Agenda 21 Groups*

The MNCSD itself consists mainly of government officials. During the two years since the inception of MAP 21, the only Agenda 21 group that was represented in the National Council were local authorities – the Mayor of Ulaanbaatar City and three aimag governors. The latter three members have not attended any meetings owing to time as well as budget constraints. However, gradual progress towards wider representation has been made. Although Agenda 21 groups are not sufficiently represented on the MNCSD itself, they have been actively involved in the MAP 21 process as a whole. The Advisory Committee consists of representatives of NGOs including women, children and youth, trade unions, academics and scientists, business and industry. The recent establishment of

the National Business Council on Sustainable Development is a valuable move toward greater private sector involvement. Moreover, input from a wide cross-section of society was solicited during numerous seminars and workshops organized by the Program Implementation Unit at the national level and the ASDAs at the local level. Often these workshops on sustainable development issues are conducted in conjunction with other organizations, mainly NGOs, thus reaching out and receiving feedback from a wider population.

** Mobilization of High-Level Political Support*

The strong political mandate and high-level support for MAP 21 has been retained through two changes of government and continues to be an important factor contributing to its success. Each of the three governments that have been in power during the MAP 21 process demonstrated support and active involvement. The recent inclusion of the Heads of three Standing Committees of Parliament has ensured an even greater political mandate. Under the overall guidance of the National Council for Sustainable Development, MAP 21 institutions and workshops provide a venue for cooperative action and foster commitment to sustainable development.

** Formulation of Long-term Strategic Vision*

Together with its high-level political support, the development of a long-term and strategic vision constitutes the greatest strength of the MAP 21 process. Owing to Mongolia's severe economic and political crisis, the majority of its people are more focussed on the struggle for daily survival than concerns of long-term sustainability. Despite this, MAP 21 has succeeded in mobilizing representatives drawn from a wide sector of society to formulate a strategy for sustainable development. The work of the MNCSD during the Mongolian Action Program 21 has enhanced coordination between separate ministries and agencies and helped to integrate separate policy areas into a unified blueprint for national and local policy-making. Aimag Action Programs carry out the same function in their respective localities. Some provincial governors have already incorporated the priority targets identified in their action programs into their policy agendas and budgeting process. The modeling exercise, which calculated several scenarios for future social, economic and environmental development of Mongolia while taking into account, where possible, the impact of current and future policies, has also served as a valuable means for capacity building, data integration and productive collaboration between various government and non-government agencies. The findings of this exercise served as a scientific base for the development of the long-term and strategic vision formulated in the "MAP 21".

** Filling a Void in the Coordination of Intersectoral Planning*

In its effort to move away from centralized planning, the democratic government that came to power in 1996 dissolved the National Development Board, a government institution which was responsible for national development planning and coordination

between ministries as well as managing foreign aid inflows. Today the government and parliament are becoming increasingly aware of the urgent need for a government agency to carry out national planning in an integrated manner and ensure coordination between various sectors. However, such a body has not been created yet and the above duties have been carried out largely by the Prime Minister's Office. Given this situation, the MNCSD with its cross-sectoral membership, the Management and Coordination Working Group and the local MAP 21 institutions have made a valuable contribution toward greater coordination across jurisdictional and sectoral lines.

** Engagement of Regional and Local Agenda 21 Initiatives*

The Mongolian Action Program 21 has been a simultaneous top-down, bottom-up process with a majority of action carried out locally, following the lead of local Agendas. The MNCSD has provided continuous support for local activities through its system of subsidiary institutions. The awareness-raising campaigns, workshops and training seminars have been organized for local governments and local communities at both national and local levels. Aimag advisors have received continuous on-the-job training on sustainable development and the methodology of developing an Aimag Action Program. Members of Parliament from almost every province were actively involved in the development of the Action Program of the aimag from which they were elected. Some prominent academics and experts were invited to help with the formulation of the AAP for the province of their origin. Workshops on sustainable development issues were integral in generating activities and high-level advocacy on Agenda 21. Such active participation not only helped to achieve support from local governments and facilitated public awareness on sustainable development, but also built broad social consensus on the nature of MAP 21.

In addition to the future-modeling project, two pilot projects have been carried out to serve as a practical demonstration of sustainable development. One of them was an anti-desertification project in East Gobi and the other – an urban agricultural settlement in the suburbs of Ulaanbaatar. Moreover, Aimag Sustainable Development Funds were established with the support from the UNDP's Mongolia Country Office. These funds were given out as an interest-free loan to small businesses or NGOs to implement a small sustainable development pilot project in each locality. The three larger pilot projects and the aimag small projects served as a useful tool for generating awareness on sustainable development and building capacity to plan and implement similar activities. MAP 21 has also promoted greater sub-regional coordination supporting better cooperation and consultation between neighboring aimags. As aimags developed their action programs, they have become increasingly aware that regional cooperation is the only solution to the problems of individual provinces. Sub-regional consultation to coordinate aimag development plans has already started within the MAP 21 process.

III. Current and Future Challenges

The major challenge facing the MNCSD and Mongolian society is ensuring the implementation of the MAP 21 by shifting from strategy development to realization.

** Building Awareness to Support Implementation of MAP 21*

Within the brief span of two years MAP 21 has been successful in facilitating a nationwide consultation for the development of Mongolian strategy for sustainable development. This broad-based participation has resulted in a fuller reflection of major interests within the MAP 21 document and thus has increased its credibility and provided for a wider acceptance of the national sustainable development strategy. MAP 21 to date succeeded in introducing the sustainable development concept and involving mainly the local and national governments, the administrations of major national NGOs and private sector representatives and white-collar workers in aimag centers. The best way of ensuring sustainable implementation of MAP 21 is by getting society to adopt the program as its own. The next step will be to reach out on a greater level to the general public and the lower administrative units, while continuing educating previously targeted groups on sustainable development. The first phase of MAP 21 has also demonstrated the importance of information networks for awareness raising and coordination of sustainable development efforts. Moreover, the membership of the MNCSD should be further enlarged in order to give Agenda 21 groups a stronger voice during consultation and decision-making. With the participation of Agenda 21 groups within the MNCSD, consultations should be more egalitarian and respectful of diverse opinions. The MNCSD ought to develop into a consensus-building body that fosters innovative approaches and collaboration between various stakeholders towards implementation of MAP 21. The same principles apply to the Environmental Committees at the local levels.

** Putting Map 21 at the Core of National Planning and Policy Making.*

The MNCSD has to lobby for a national planning and coordinating mechanism that will focus on the Mongolian Action Program. The establishment of a coordinating unit to guide MAP 21 implementation requires government resolution and/or parliamentary legislation. Approval of the main components of MAP 21 by the Parliament and/or Standing committees of the Parliament would ensure sustainability of MAP 21 as a national strategy that does not depend on changes of government. Given the importance of creating a suitable institutional framework for the implementation of MAP 21, the next step of the MNCSD is to facilitate national consultation on possible options. This includes discussion on the status and the mandate of the MNCSD itself.

** Need for Continued Capacity Building.*

The Program Implementation Unit, with support from Capacity 21 and under the guidance from MNCSD, will continue to facilitate institutional and human capacity building process within MAP 21 by conducting training and offering consulting services on sustainable development. This area needs continuous strengthening across a wide spectrum of

participants including the MNCSD members. The MNCSD should lobby for inclusion of sustainable development issues into the curricula of educational institutions at all levels.

** Selection of Priority Areas to Focus Resources and Efforts*

In order to maximize the impact of the limited resources available, the MNCSD should facilitate a consultation on selecting a few priority areas in MAP 21 for immediate implementation, such as mining, environmental monitoring, water management, energy and land use.

** Investments Required in Monitoring and Self-Evaluation*

The MNCSD has not had a comprehensive monitoring methodology. It should facilitate creation of sustainable development indicators and an efficient mechanism for monitoring the implementation of MAP 21 and learning from experience.

** Mobilization of a National and Local Resource Base*

UNDP's Capacity 21 has agreed to offer financial and technical support for the next two years of MAP 21. However, in order to ensure the continuity of MAP 21 implementation, a mechanism for resource mobilization has to be designed at the national and local levels. There is a need to allocate national and local budgets in conformity with MAP 21. Additional funds could be used at a national level as a revolving sustainable development fund.

** Greater Emphasis should be given to International Cooperation*

Finally, to achieve maximum success the Mongolian national development has to be coordinated with global sustainable development. The MAP 21 has not paid sufficient attention to the needs of coordinating MAP 21 with other countries in the region. The MNCSD should be more active in maintaining links and collaborating with its equivalents in other countries and the U.N Commission on Sustainable Development as well as other national and international sustainable development initiatives. In this way, the lessons of Agenda 21 will be shared and continued regional and global coordination for sustainable development will continue.

Sources

INTERVIEWS

Mr. Adyasuren – Advisor to the Minister of Nature and Environment, former Minister of Nature and Environment, former Vice Chairman of the MNCSD

Mr. Badarch – SDA, UNDP CO, Mongolia; former National Coordinator of MAP 21

Mr. Bayrsaikhan – Chair, Standing Committee on Environment and Rural Policy, Parliament of Mongolia, member of MNCSD, assisted with Omnogobi AAP

Mr. Chimeddagva – Head, Economic Policy Department, Ministry of Finance, former Head of the Management and Coordination Working Group of MAP 21

Ms. Chuluuntsetseg – Manager, PIU

Mr. Dashtsoo – Governor of Zamun Ud sum implementing a pilot project on combating desertification

Mr. Delgertsogt – Chief, Department of Strategy Management, Cabinet Secretariat, Head of the Management and Coordination Working Group of MAP 21

Mr. Dembrel – Chair, National Business Council on Sustainable Development; Chair, Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Economic Adviser to the Prime Minister

Mr. Gankhuyag – Director, Department of International Organizations, member of MNCSD

Ms. Gerelsuren – President, Mongolian Women’s Federation, National Sustainable Development Advisor

Mr. Khuldorj – National Coordinator, MAP 21

Mr. Lkhagvajav – Advisor to the Minister of Education, former Minister of Education, former member of MNCSD

Prof. Nyamdavaa – Social Policy Advisor to the President of Mongolia, National Sustainable Development Advisor

Mr. Tsendbayar – Director, Mongolian Consumers’ Association

Ms. Tsetsgee – Managers, MAP 21 PIU

DOCUMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS

The “MAP 21” Executive Summary

Report of the Future Modeling Exercise

Capacity 21 reports on MAP 21

Minutes of MNCSD and MCWG meetings

Project Document for MAP 21

Rio +5 Forum. “Making Sustainable Development Work: A Vision and Practical Measures for National Councils as Effective Mechanisms for Sustainable Development.”