

Assessing Democratic Governance in Mongolia

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*Governance Assessments and the Paris Declaration:
Towards Inclusive Participation and National Ownership*

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Mongolia: The Country Context

Mongolia is a landlocked country nestled between Russia and China. The population was just over 2.5 million in 2006, with one million living in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city, and the rest dispersed over 1.6 million square kilometers – a land area the size of Iran with 66.4 million and twice the size of Pakistan with 152.1 million people. Per capita income increased from USD 737 in 2005 to USD 1036.8 in 2006, as a result of the high revenue of the country's mineral sector that extracts, among other things, copper, molybdenum and gold. With a cold, harsh climate and short growing seasons, Mongolia experiences periodic severe winters, known as "zuds," and frequent droughts.

The annual population growth rate declined from 1.5 percent in 2001 to 1.2 percent in 2004. Life expectancy at birth is 64.6 years (61.6 for men and 67.8 for women). Nearly two-thirds of the population are under 30 years old. With rapid rural-urban migration, nearly three-fifths of the total population currently live in urban areas (Ulaanbaatar and the 21 aimag centers). Mongolia's Human Development Index score was 0.691 in 2006, giving it a ranking of 116 (1 being the highest) in the world.

Despite the continuing economic growth, poverty remains persistent in both rural and urban areas: 36 percent of the population live below the national poverty line, the equivalent of USD 0.75 a day. Income inequality has widened, with the Gini coefficient having increased from 0.31 in 1995 to 0.44 in 2002. Urban poverty is becoming a more serious problem owing to rapid internal migration.

In line with the 1992 Constitution, Mongolia is a parliamentary democracy with a directly elected head of state, the President. The Parliament (the State Great Hural) has 76 seats. Since 1990, Mongolia has had five parliamentary elections and four presidential elections. Elections have been highly contested campaigns resulting in consecutive hand-overs of government power from one party to another. Altogether, there are more than registered 25 political parties, with seven parties currently represented in parliament. Since 1990, Mongolia has had 11 Prime Ministers (9 after 1996). Since 1996, Mongolia has experienced a period of political instability with legislative gridlock, delays in appointment of the Prime Minister, and intensive political party competition. In 2000, Mongolia adopted the concept of "good governance for human security" and has since introduced a public administration and finance reform to improve the performance of the public sector. In 2001, Mongolia established its Human Rights Commission, and in 2007, an Anti-Corruption Agency.

The Governance Assessment Context

The International Background: ICNRD-5 Initiative (2003)

In September 2003, Mongolia hosted the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies¹ (ICNRD-5), which brought together over 500 participants from 119 states to discuss democracy, good governance and civil society. The conference adopted the Ulaanbaatar Declaration and Plan of Action that committed participating governments to implement action plans to strengthen democracy. The presenter in her capacity as adviser to the ICNRD-5 participated in the formulation of the following specific recommendations for governments to “draw up a national plan for strengthening democracy..., prepare country information notes outlining the prospects of advancing and deepening democracy and... develop nationally-owned democratic governance indicators databases to be better able to monitor progress in democratic and social development over time.”². As host and chair of ICNRD-5, Mongolia developed an ICNRD-5 Follow-Up Project to implement the 2003 Conference recommendations. There had been no previous democratic governance assessments, and the Follow-up Project was initiated in relation to a particular international event and the commitment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. There was also immediate access to UNDP funding that made the exercise possible.

The National Background: Stagnation in Democracy Progress

The stagnation of the democratic process in Mongolia in the early 2000s as evidenced by popular discontent with government policies, entrenched corruption, parliamentary gridlock, and direct participation of business groups in both political parties and government necessitated a fundamental reappraisal of the major strengths and weaknesses of Mongolia’s democracy. A reappraisal should in turn lead to a plan of action to remedy the democratic malaise.

Also, by the early 2000s, the human and political costs of neo-liberal market economy reforms in the absence of an effective, clean state, a well-planned reform program, the rule of law, and a mature citizenry with a capacity for self-organization had become apparent. The HDI and the HPI were at a worrisome level with little prospects for improvement. Rather than decreasing in scope, poverty had become a prevailing trend. Democracy had not been delivering a material reward to the majority of the population. The alienation between the citizens and the democratic process was evidenced by numerous polls.

¹ The International Conference of New or Restored Democracies (ICNRD) is an intergovernmental process open to all UN member States. Since the first Conference was held with the participation of 13 countries, the ICNRD has grown into a global event bringing together more than 100 countries from all over the world. To date, a total of six International Conferences of New or Restored Democracies have been held in Manila, the Philippines (1988); Managua, Nicaragua (1994); Bucharest, Romania (1997); Cotonou, Benin (2000), Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia (2003), and the latest in Doha, Qatar (2006).

² Final Documents of ICNRD-5: Ulaanbaatar Declaration and Plan of Action, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 2003

Another important consideration for introducing a democratic governance assessment was the need to enhance more national ownership in conceptualization and design of democratic reforms. Many had been modelled along democracy standards and praxis of mature long-standing democracies. More attention had to be paid to Mongolia's particularities such as nomadism, lack of civil society, and the need for better consensus and cohesion rather than competitiveness and political contestation in a small country. Also, the Mongolian political community had been all too willing to embrace the political experiences of other countries without paying adequate attention to the nation's political history and its traditional cultural context.

The Nature of the Assessment

The Project staff, along with the national research team, identified a series of inter-related activities that would lead to the development of Democratic Governance Indicators (DGIs), a Country Information Note (CIN), a National Plan of Action (NPA) and a Civil Society Index (CSI), as well a series of national and international events and other complementary activities.

The IDEA Democracy Assessment was accepted as the framework to develop non-ranking national governance indicators intended to create a baseline for governance reform. The Mongolia initiative represented the first 'new' democracy piloting the IDEA methodology and first country to adopt the assessment within a government led process that included all stakeholders.

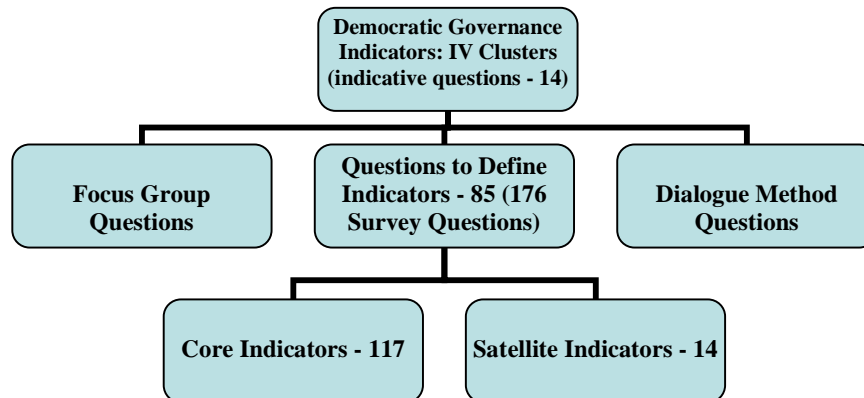
The IDEA Democracy Assessment framework enabled the Mongolian researchers to measure the state of democracy through an appraisal of citizenship, law and rights, representative and accountable government, civil society and popular participation, and democracy beyond borders on the basis of 'core' and 'satellite' indicators³. The core indicators measured common values of democratic governance while the satellite indicators referred to national characteristics (see Figure 1⁴). The Mongolia assessment had been an in-depth two-year assessment focusing on all major dimensions of democratic governance (adapted IDEA framework with mixed research methods) with qualitative and quantitative indicators. The Mongolian DGIs "mixed" method included quantitative methods (administrative statistics, elite surveys, mass surveys, expert judgments) and qualitative (dialogues, focus groups, and narratives⁵. The Mongolia exercise was based on a bottom-up approach with the main emphasis falling on the use of the results of a nation-wide popular survey as contrasted with a more traditional experts'-opinion-based assessments.

³ In 2004, the presenter participated in a meeting with UNDP governance experts on a mission in Mongolia when the concept of 'core' and 'satellite' indicators was first introduced in Mongolia. Later, the concept was adapted into Mongolia's DGIs concept. The then UNDP mission included Messrs R. Sudarshan and Joachim Nahem who later served as International Advisor to the Follow-up Project.

⁴ Source: Democratic Governance Indicators: Assessing the State of Governance in Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2006, p.42

⁵ Source: Handbook on Democratic Governance Indicators. Method, Process and Lessons Learned from Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2006, p.14

Figure 1. DGIs Chart



In order to ensure the engagement of all stakeholders and the future practical use of the DGIs, the project invited researchers that were generally viewed as the leading experts in their academic fields and enjoyed high respect and esteem among Mongolian stakeholders. A particular emphasis was also made to balance any political affiliation that the researchers had with political parties or causes.

The Assessment Process

The national research team and the project staff ultimately decided on what to measure and how to measure Mongolia's democracy. The decisions would consequently be reviewed and validated by other experts and stakeholders. The political dynamics of the project were dependent on the interaction between the project staff, researchers, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and local stakeholders. The UNDP advice was important both technically and as expression of international support to the exercise. Also, it was important to have politically experienced staff to forward the agenda of both the project and the assessment.

As for the engagement of stakeholders, the DGIs preliminary findings were presented to a national conference in June 2005, which provided important feedback as well as validation for developing DGIs in Mongolia. The stakeholders were identified by the project and the research team, and were involved in the assessment process through meetings and consultations. The cooperation with stakeholders continued throughout the duration of the project. The same stakeholders will be participating in the process of developing MDG-9 indicators.

The final findings of the research team entitled "Democratic Governance Indicators: Assessing the State of Mongolia's Governance" (370 page draft report) were presented at a national all-stakeholder conference on "Democratic Governance Indicators: Assessment and Challenges" held on 2 May 2006.

The DGIs research team also consulted and cooperated with the National Statistical Office (NSO) in line with a memorandum of understanding signed in 2006. An

important aspect of the process was to engage with key international partners who specialize on democracy assessments. During the course of 2005-2006, International IDEA and Essex University provided technical assistance to the DGI activities. In particular, a technical workshop with international experts was held in Ulaanbaatar in June 2005 to build the capacity of DGIs researchers, civil society assessors and key government agencies on how to collect, process and analyze data for democracy assessments.

In general, the exercise received support and engaged with a broad host of international partners during the follow-up process. On June 1-2, 2006, the Government of Mongolia hosted a Follow-up to ICNRD-5 International Conference in Ulaanbaatar. Representatives of 12 countries and 23 international organizations along with representatives of Mongolia's Government, the Parliament, academia, and civil society attended the conference and reviewed the Mongolia assessment, providing important recommendations for the final phase.

Complimentary Assessments

Urban Governance Index (UGI)

As a complimentary activity to the DGI Assessment, the Follow-up Project carried out an assessment of urban governance in Ulaanbaatar using UN Habitat's methodology for producing an urban governance index (UGI). Urban Governance was identified as a 'satellite issue' for Mongolia by the DGIs research team. The UGI assessed urban governance across the four areas of effectiveness, equity, participation, and accountability. The findings of the UGI were also reflected in the overall DGIs assessment⁶.

Civil Society Index (CSI)

Another complimentary exercise to the DGIs assessment was the Civil Society Index (CSI) developed by the CEDAW Watch (now Citizens' Alliance Center), which served as Interim Secretariat of the International Civil Society Forum in 2003. The work on the CSI was based on the CIVICUS method that assessed the quality of civil society across the four dimensions of structure, values, environment and impact.

Both indices, the UGI and the CSI, were based on a large collection of information and data through a broadly inclusive and consultative process, and represented 'performance profiles'.

Country Information Note (CIN)

As part of the follow-up to ICNRD-5, Mongolia implemented a Country Information Note (CIN) on democratic performance. The CIN was also used as a complimentary information source for DGIs as it included an expert judgment exercise. The CIN used

⁶ See Section VII "Urban Governance Index" in *Democratic Governance Indicators: Assessing the State of Governance in Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2006*, pp. 83-94

the IDEA framework as a basis for judging the quality of Mongolian democracy on a scale ranging from 1 (low rating) to 5 (high rating).

The experts rated Mongolia’s state of democratic governance at 3.02 points, which the CIN summarized as signifying a proportional mix of democratic and non-democratic characteristics.⁷

National Plan of Action (NPA)

The NPA was developed in tandem with the DGI and CIN and drew on the results from the entire set of the follow-up activities. The Plan noted that Mongolia needed to overcome a series of challenges that were typical of new democracies, including access to information, control of corruption, limitations of state power, development of civil society, independence of the judiciary, and strengthening the rule of law more generally.

Figure 2⁸: National Plan of Action

Short-term outcomes	Long-term outcomes
Creation of a favourable environment for comprehensive public participation	Strengthen democratic consolidation
Advancement in the civil political culture of all citizens	Guarantee openness, transparency, and accountability for all state policies and activities
Strengthening of the relationship between the state and citizens	Embedding democratic values and democratic beliefs
Creation of a fair electoral system	Constrain state power and reduce corruption
Professionalization of state institutions	Strengthen and democratize political party organizations

The Outcomes of the Assessment and Subsequent Challenges

The Mongolia exercise identified the following national and international outcomes:

1. A new government-led democracy assessment tool was created based on the application of core and satellite indicators.
2. The first government-led democratic governance assessment was implemented by national researchers for national needs (democracy

⁷ See Section IV “Country Information Note” in Democratic Governance Indicators: Assessing the State of Governance in Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2006, pp. 55-66

⁸ Source: Consolidated Report: Mongolia’s Follow-up to the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, Ulaanbaatar, 2006, p. 12

consolidation) based on nationally-developed indicators. The assessment was done by Mongolians and for Mongolians. However, its methodology was internationally validated, with core indicators providing for a comparative opportunity.

3. Mongolian researchers have fully absorbed the concept and practical methodology of developing DGIs and international experiences in the area of governance indicators. The national capacity for such assessments has been significantly increased.
4. Significant capacity-building has been evidenced by NGOs that have participated in the DGIs process as stakeholders in terms of their research capacity and coalition-building. The same refers to government agencies that took part in the process as stakeholders.
5. The Mongolian political community has become informed of a methodology to measure democracy progress. The Government of Mongolia and national democracy stakeholders, including media, have been using the DGIs as the most comprehensive reference in their reporting on the state of democracy and in identifying political interventions. This trend will increase with the approaching next round of political elections in Mongolia in 2008-2009. By that time, the second-generation survey will have been conducted and its findings released along with the indicators for MDG-9 formulated and formalized by the Parliament.
6. The Mongolia exercise has established a link between national democracy assessment and democratic interventions aimed to consolidate democracy by linking an assessment and a plan of action.
7. The Mongolia's MDG-9 on human rights, democracy and anti-corruption has particularly benefited from the development of DGIs and will in its turn help institutionalize the application of DGIs in a government reporting mechanism.
8. The ICNRD process boasted the first ever follow-up in between conferences, with practical outputs such as the DGIs, the CIN, and lessons for new and mature democracies.
9. The international governance indicators experience has been enriched with yet another new practice implemented by a small country. Governance indicators discourse will now include a Mongolia case that may with appropriate contextualization be adapted in other countries.

The Mongolia exercise confronted the following challenges:

1. Apart from the challenges of developing the methodology of the DGIs, there were difficulties in ensuring the logical design of the process due mostly to technical factors.
2. The process of informing the Mongolian researchers of the methodology and requirements of the design took more time than expected, mostly because of English language constraints.

3. The institutional location of the project at the MFA had both advantages, such as autonomy from national agencies responsible for reporting on human rights and the rule of law, and disadvantages, such as the relative lack of experience in working on coalition-building inside the country.
4. The lack of experience among the researchers in developing government-style documentation (as opposed to academic writing), led to the reediting of the Plan of Action to reflect legal and style requirements.
5. Another challenge was to educate the political community and other stakeholders, the media in particular, of the concept and application of DGIs. In others words, there was the challenge of translating the exercise into a more public language.
6. The biggest challenge, however, was the dominant trend in government decision-making that tended to be reflect group and party interests, rather than informed and rationally planned decision-making processes. The challenge thus was to ensure, through coalition-building, the interest of political decision-makers in the full application of the Mongolia exercise outputs, in particular the Plan of Action.

The Continuation (2007)

On April 21, 2005 Mongolia adopted its 9th Millennium Development Goal on human rights, anti-corruption and democracy. MDG-9 has three associated targets: (1) to uphold the rights found in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, (2) to uphold and inculcate democratic principles and values, and (3) to show zero-tolerance of corruption. Mongolia remains the only country in the world to have formulated a governance-related MDG.

MDG-9 and its associated targets, which are to be achieved by 2015, present a golden opportunity to institutionalize the DGIs and ensure a sustainable democracy monitoring system over time. The above objectives have been institutionalised in the new project "Support in Achieving MDG-9 on Human Rights and Democratic Governance", funded by the United Nations Democracy Fund in support of Mongolia's initiative on Democratic Governance Indicators (DGIs). The project is now executed by the Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law (IPSL) of the Academy of Sciences of Mongolia.

References and Links

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