

PEOPLE-DRIVEN UPGRADING POLICY NEWS from MONGOLIA



Almost 60% of the population in Mongolia's capitol city Ulaanbaatar live in the squalid, unplanned, polluted and unserviced ger areas that sprawl like a vast carpet across the hills and empty land around the city. In smaller towns and villages, the figure climbs to 80-90% of the population. But even though a hefty majority of Mongolians now live in these informal settlements, neither the national government nor the various local government agencies have paid much attention to the problems in ger areas in their constituencies or taken any measures to address them.

But the people who live in these ger areas have not been so complacent. Over the past five years, ger area community members in towns, cities and urban districts all over Mongolia

have organized themselves into savings groups, rolled up their sleeves and shown that they are ready to improve their economic situation, their living environment and their housing and can do it themselves very efficiently and readily, with just a little support. Through hundreds of small projects to pave roads, paint fences, build parks and community centers, lay drainage lines and water supply, construct bridges, manufacture biomass fuel bricks and improve housing, these community groups are showing a simple, direct and people-driven way to upgrade Mongolia's informal ger areas. With support from two key NGOs - the Urban Development Resource Center (UDRC) and Center on Housing Rights and Development (CHRD) - and with funding support from the ACCA program, this people-driven ger area upgrading has now begun catching the notice of the government.

Enhe Tsendendorj, from UDRC, writes that in Ulaanbaatar, the mayor has now created the city's first program which focuses on improving the infrastructure and housing in ger areas, inspired by the people-driven model that has been amply demonstrated in his city. To support and strengthen the people-driven ger area upgrading process that has already begun, the city has set up two new institutions: the Ger Area Development Agency and the Ger Area Housing Project. The program will support five activities:

- Develop housing through re-planning of ger areas.
- Re-plan urban lands with citizens' involvement, improve land utilization, increase value of land, develop ger areas into private housing areas, and improve people's living conditions in those areas.
- Provide housing for the target group by promoting the development of alternative rental housing.
- Promote housing through creation of new residential areas.
- Improve the condition of old apartment buildings through retrofitting.

Under the new program, the city government will provide assistance to ger area communities to survey their settlements, identify problems and develop their own area redevelopment plans (to include road paving, drainage, water supply and municipal heating pipes), which will then be submitted to the Ger Area Development Agency for approval. The city government will then hire private-sector contractors to do the main redevelopment work, according to the community plans, with funding from the state and city budgets and as much involvement of the communities as possible. In the first round of the new program, 12 ger areas were selected for redevelopment in 2013, and another 8 ger areas are underway in 2014.



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