Creating a Culture of Participation

Voices of Mongolian Adolescents
Telling the UN Story

January 2004
Ulaanbaatar
This publication is dedicated to the memory of our much loved colleagues, Matthew Girvin, UNICEF Programme Officer, and Dr. B. Bayarmaa, National Programme Officer for UNFPA who were tragically killed in a helicopter crash on January 14th 2001, while on a UN mission. Matthew’s vision and commitment guided the consultative process of the first phase of the project and it was he who coordinated the inter-sectoral, interagency proposal to the United Nations Foundation for “Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls and Boys”. Dr. B. Bayarmaa’s experience and insight provided valuable input into the planning of the project.

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List of Acronyms and Terms

ADC    Adolescent Development Centre
AIDS   Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
Aimag  Mongolian Province
Bagh   Smallest administrative division. Soums are divided into baghs (hamlet)
CRC    Convention on the Rights of the Child
Ger    Traditional Mongolian round felt tent, built on a structure of wooden poles
HIV    Human Immune Deficiency Virus
MANAS  Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey Report, 2000
MOH    Ministry of Health
MOSEC  Ministry of Science, Education and Culture
MOSWL  Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour
MYDC   Mongolian Youth Development Centre
NAF    National Aids Foundation
NCC    National Committee for Children
NBC    National Board for Children
NGO    Non governmental organisation
SAM    Scouts Association of Mongolia
STI    Sexually Transmitted Infection
Soum   Administrative division. Aimags are divided into soums (village)
UNCT   United Nations Country Team
UNDP   United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNF    United Nations Foundation
UNFIP  United Nations Fund for International Partnerships
UNFPA  United National Population Fund
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO    World Health Organisation
Foreword

Text of Foreword to be approved by Heads of all four UN agencies.

Mr. Aoyushi          Mr. Birat Simha        Mr. Richard Prado, Mr. Robert Hagan
Regional Representative     Representative            Representative  Representative
UNESCO   UNFPA    UNICEF                         WHO

Ulaanbaatar, January 2004
CREATING A CULTURE OF PARTICIPATION

"WE HAVE A NEW CONFIDENCE IN OUR OWN POWERS"

Fifteen year old Bukhdelger and her friends were eager to show off their new Adolescents Development Centre - a large and very pleasant room, its walls covered with colourful wall newspapers, handcrafted albums of photographs, creatively presented information about health, the environment, child rights, the activities of the Students Council and various youth initiated clubs and associations. On a television screen in the corner an activity organised by the Students Council was playing, filmed by students themselves. There was even a piano.

Not much more than two years ago, this cheerful room had been part of one of those gloomy and gargantuan corridors, so favoured by school architects of a certain era, even in a rural soum (village) such as Kotont, in Arkhangai aimag (province). In their enthusiasm that we should understand the change that had taken place within themselves and their school during the project “Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls (and Boys)”, the girls gathered around us……

“We used to think that we could not do anything for ourselves, and we always hoped that others, such as our parents and teachers would be able to change our society for the better. Now we have begun to believe that we can do many things for ourselves and we have a new confidence in our own powers and capabilities. This project has helped us to develop ourselves, to help others and to organize our own activities. We learned about important things that affect our lives and then we shared this knowledge with others. It is better when youth teach youth. If we develop, then our country will develop.”

This book has been created from the contributions of thousands of Mongolian adolescents, who have told their stories in interviews, who have written hundreds of letters to the Adolescents Board, expressing their opinions and their feelings, who have taken part in countless activities which have contributed positively to the lives of many people during the implementation of the project "Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls and Boys".

Mongolian adolescents are working for the transformation of their society by….

- helping out-of-school youth to return to school or non-formal education
- helping pre-school children who have no access to kindergarten, to prepare for school
- conducting peer education about the risks of smoking and alcohol consumption
- acquiring and sharing information with their peers about reproductive health
- actively working to establish an adolescent friendly health standard
- taking the initiative to organize out-of-school activities
- participating in the decision making process in their schools
- offering their services to help vulnerable families and the elderly
They are bringing about a radical change of consciousness in…

- adults, who are learning to see adolescents as potential resources rather than problems
- parents, who are learning to see that adolescents have the capacity to make responsible choices
- teachers, who are discovering that interaction and participation in the classroom is a dynamic learning experience for both teachers and students
- health professionals who are understanding the need for adolescent friendly health services and confidentiality
- adolescents, who are empowered to believe that they can be agents of change

Initiatives taken within the context of ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents’ have effected changes by

- influencing law and government policy
- democratizing institutional structures
- strengthening civil society
- increasing inter-agency cooperation
- improving the learning environment
- increasing communication within the family
- providing a model for adolescent friendly health services
- innovative approaches to adolescent health clinics
- increasing awareness about adolescent issues at the level of the individual, the community and the institutions

The evidence is indisputable - Youth Can Move the World.

(Photos of the school hall at Erdenemandal)

Part 1: AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

Adolescents in Focus

We are living in the most turbulent time of the history of humankind, in which changes are taking place at a rate never before experienced, sometimes with cataclysmic results. This is the world in which adolescents are approaching adulthood and it is they who are shouldering a large proportion of the burdens of change. There is ample evidence of the confusion and helplessness that adolescents feel, in the life style that they adopt, in their habits and behavior.

The period of adolescence is itself a time of transition and of rapid change. It is a time of turbulence, but it is also a time of the greatest energy and receptivity, when the capacities latent within each young person are becoming manifest. It is a time when guidance and support from adults within the family, the community and the government is a crucial factor in the development of these capacities. In spite of this, adolescents have, until now, largely been ignored as a focus for special attention.
However, in May 2002, at the UN Special Session for Children, two adolescent representatives from Mongolia joined more than 400 children and adolescents who had been invited to participate in a United Nations General Assembly meeting for the first time in the history of the United Nations. This proved to be a turning point in the process of adolescent participation worldwide.

'A World Fit for Us', the Children's Statement, was read by two adolescents at the opening plenary session to Heads of State, the leadership of the UN, leaders of thought and representatives of civil society and non-governmental organisations throughout the world. The final paragraphs are a challenge that cannot be ignored.

"We pledge an equal partnership in this fight for children's rights. And while we promise to support the actions you take on behalf of children, we also ask for your commitment and support in the actions we are taking—because the children of the world are misunderstood. We are not the sources of problems; we are the resources that are needed to solve them. We are not expenses; we are investments. We are not just young people; we are people and citizens of this world.

Until others accept their responsibility to us, we will fight for our rights. We have the will, the knowledge, the sensitivity and the dedication. We promise that as adults we will defend children's rights with the same passion that we now have as children. We promise to treat each other with dignity and respect. We promise to be open and sensitive to our differences.

We are the children of the world, and despite our different backgrounds, we share a common reality. We are united by our struggle to make the world a better place for all. You call us the future, but we are also the present."

Photo of Adolescents using the ADC in Erdenebulgan

Mongolian Adolescents

Growing up in a society in transition

Mongolia is a country of contrasts. In the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, Buddhist Temples lie alongside towering glass office blocks reflecting the blue sky. New apartment blocks overlook the surrounding hills, covered with a sprawling patchwork of round Mongolian gers, the traditional wood and felt tent dwelling used by Mongolians for thousands of years. An increasing number of Mercedes Benz slow down the traffic in the city, while in the countryside groups of families migrate with their herds, hundreds of miles on horseback and Yak cart, seeking pasture that has not been devastated by summer droughts, harsh winter snows, and overgrazing.

Nearly half of all Mongolians live outside urban areas in gers or simple wood or wattle and daub homes, many in remote rural areas, which are accessible only by rough tracks. Water must be carried from the nearest river, lake, spring or well, and wood or dried dung must be collected and prepared as fuel for heating and cooking. The main source of livelihood is herding the five domestic animals - horses, cattle, camels, sheep and goats, which roam freely in the unfenced countryside.
Mongolia is a youthful country, in which almost half of the total population is under 19, and one quarter is adolescents. In addition to having to cope with the rapid changes that are taking place globally, and the changes that are taking place within their own bodies and minds, Mongolia's adolescents are a ‘transition generation’, having to cope psychologically and practically with the challenges of the political, economic and social changes that have taken place during their childhood. They are approaching maturity in a world that is completely different from the one in which their parents became adults, where education and health care were assured, and employment for all school leavers was guaranteed.

When, in 1990, seventy years of a centrally planned system gave way to a free market economy, overnight, agricultural collectives and industries were privatized, and economic ties with the Soviet Union were severed. As a result many enterprises collapsed, and thousands of people found themselves out of work. While some became rich, many families fell into poverty. Living standards in rural and peri-urban areas continue to deteriorate, while designer clothes, the latest technology and restaurants offering international cuisine are increasingly available in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, to those who can afford them.

With unemployment, many people have taken up livestock herding. The resulting increase in the number of animals has led to overgrazing, which exacerbates the devastation caused to delicate pastureland by the dzud (summer droughts followed by harsh winter snows), causing the slow death of thousands of productive animals. With the loss of their herds, many families migrate or move to new locations in urban areas, where they need to re-register. This process involves a considerable amount of bureaucracy and the registration fee was beyond the means of many families, until its abolition in summer 2003 by the government. An adolescent without registration is denied access to education and health services. In rural areas, many families who remain, struggle to survive by keeping school age boys at home to help with the herds, leading to an unusual situation, in which more boys than girls are denied their right to education.

Hand in hand with poverty and unemployment has come an increase in alcoholism. As a result many families are no longer able to provide the secure and nurturing environment within which adolescents can explore their identity, develop their capabilities, experiment with independence and begin to take responsibility for their own lives.

Nevertheless, in every crisis lie opportunities. Mongolia has many strengths, which place it in a unique position among developing countries. The people of Mongolia are literate and educated, as a result of 70 years of compulsory and free education under a socialist government. Girls have equal access to education, and by the 8th grade the number of girls in school is significantly higher than that of boys. There is an attitude of learning at all levels, from Central Government to local community, and an open-minded approach to change.

Mongolia has preserved a traditional nomadic culture, which is valued by all Mongolians, who have a real desire to keep alive all that is unique within the culture, and to make it workable in the 21st Century. A strong extended family network exists, which links many urban and rural families. Though Mongolia is a vast country, almost the size of Western Europe, it has a small population of less than two and a half million, which makes it comparatively easy to make contact with people at every level of society, in spite of the remoteness of many communities and difficulties of travel. With attention now focused for the first time on adolescents, Mongolia has a window of opportunity to set an example to the rest of the world in providing a safe and supportive environment for this most dynamic of generations.
Voices of Youth – identifying the needs

In 1999, for the first time, attention was turned towards adolescents with the adoption of an inter-country project on adolescent girls’ rights to participation and development, supported by the United Nations Foundation (UNF) with funds donated by the philanthropist, Ted Turner. Within ‘Meeting the Participation and Development Rights of Mongolian Adolescent Girls’, the aim was to incorporate adolescent participation at many levels of the decision-making process. All activities were aimed towards encouraging the participation of adolescents and to opening channels of communication between adolescents and the government, NGOs and the general public in order to raise awareness of adolescent needs and developmental rights.

“Before this project I used to read books and listen to my teachers and memorise what they told me, and I thought that this was development. But now we are planning and organizing many activities, and I know that this is when we really develop, when we do things. We have learned that there are many different ways to help others and that there are many different ways in which we can develop ourselves”

Narangerel (13) Alagerdene, Khuvsgul aimag

Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey Report

One of the earliest initiatives taken by the UN Country Team and the Government of Mongolia, was to conduct a comprehensive needs assessment among over 2,500 adolescents from all walks of life. Adolescent participation was sought at every stage of the survey process, and the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey Report, coordinated by UNICEF and organized by the Scouts Association of Mongolia, proved to be a unique document, covering many, hitherto unconsidered, aspects of adolescents’ lives.

Adolescence brings the child to the threshold of adulthood, where his or her full potential can be realised. These are critical years of rapid growth of the capacity for abstract thinking, during which encouragement, support and guidance from parents, and physical and mental stimulation are crucial. However, among the more disturbing findings of the Report was the fact that more than a third of the adolescents felt that their parents do not understand them, and a fifth felt that their parents do not care for them. Many suffered from shyness, timidity and a lack of confidence, and a high proportion from loneliness and a sense of isolation. More than 200 adolescent attempted suicides a year were reported by the Public Military Hospital in Ulaanbaatar. Schools were seen as unhealthy, uncomfortable and uninviting environments, where teaching methods were authoritarian rather than child-centered, and where students were expected to be passive and unquestioning. For more than a third, major problems were bullying by their peers and discrimination by teachers. As a consequence many adolescents have dropped out of school. Many others are out of school because of circumstances that are beyond their control. They would like to study, but are denied access because they do not have the necessary registration and the schools are overcrowded, or because their parents have kept them home to care for a sick member of the family, or to help with the herds.

Adolescents declared that there was no appropriate place for young people to meet, and a lack of extra-curricular activities. Nearly half of the respondents said that they spent their free time doing housework, which young people in many other countries would be more likely to think of as ‘work’ rather than ‘free time’. They felt they had limited access to information in general, and in particular to health information. They also had limited access to health care, and a lack of both confidentiality and sensitivity deterred them from consulting health professionals.
"Our whole class read the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Report because our teacher said it would be useful in the Debating Society. We liked it very much and found it easy to understand and very interesting. It is talking about our own situation." Zolzaya(15)

“Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls and Boys”

The adolescents’ perception of their own needs was the foundation for the design of a three year project, “Improving the Outlook for Adolescent Girls and Boys in Mongolia”, funded by UNF. This integrated multi-sectoral programme was designed, in collaboration with adolescents and communities as well as the Government of Mongolia and NGO's, to respond to priority adolescent concerns in health, education, participation, and communication, as identified in the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey Report. This project is currently taking place in a limited number of pilot sites at central, provincial, and local district (soum) levels, including rural, urban and peri-urban settlements. In Arkhangai and Khuvsgul aimags (provinces) and Songinokhairkhan, Chingeltei and Bayanzurkh districts of Ulaanbaatar, a total of 17 schools have been chosen as project sites. Each area has been chosen on the basis of a number of criteria - a high population of adolescents, a high percentage of school drop-outs and teenage abortion rate, accessibility from the capital city of Ulaanbaatar, and the willingness of the local authorities to participate in the project.

Creating a Consultative Climate

"Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls and Boys" reflected, in its implementing structure, the principles which lay behind its goals. Consultation, cooperation and a united and integrated approach to planning, implementation and evaluation are central. It aims to be an integrated, sustainable multi-sectoral programme, in which Government Ministries, UN agencies, NGO's and adolescents themselves consult and collaborate together to identify and respond to the priority needs identified by the adolescents themselves in the MANAS Report 2000. Adolescent participation in the decision making process at every level was seen as essential, as was inter-ministerial and inter-agency consultation and collaboration.

As an embodiment of these principles, an inter-ministerial and interagency Task Force was set up to guide the project, and an Adolescents Board was created to advise, support, monitor and evaluate the project implementation.

Advised by the Task Force and the Adolescents Board, two sectoral working groups for the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Education (MOSEC) and four cooperating UN agencies, (UNESCO, UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO), each have their own clear duties and responsibilities. Of all the countries taking part, Mongolia is alone in having as many as four UN agencies involved in the Adolescents Project, and it is not an easy task to organize effective cooperation between so many agencies. To facilitate cooperation, therefore, a Coordinating Support Unit was set up, with the responsibility of helping to organize consultation and sharing of information.

As each of the four UN agencies and the relevant Ministries are concentrating on complementary, but different approaches to meeting adolescent participation and development rights. UNICEF is focusing on the all important, and until now, largely ignored, area of adolescent participation. WHO and UNFPA are concentrating their efforts in the areas of health and reproductive health, with particular emphasis on well being and protective factors, while UNESCO is developing
programmes of distance learning and non-formal education. Efforts are being made to integrate each agency’s initiatives so that adolescents in the pilot areas derive the maximum benefit from these separate but linked activities.

There is encouraging evidence that a cooperative and multi-sectoral approach is effective. In each school the Adolescent Development Centre is the nerve centre of the Student Council, which represents the adolescent voice, and which influences policy and practice within the school. The ADC is also the base for youth initiated clubs and youth non-governmental organizations, the formation and organization of which are being encouraged by training and by the publication of guidelines. The 'My Passport' Campaign develops the skills of active participation, by encouraging groups to acquire as much information as possible about various key issues related to the well-being of adolescents, such as Children's Rights and Reproductive Health, and then conduct peer education. All these initiatives are supported by UNICEF, and implemented by the Scouts Association of Mongolia and the Mongolian Youth Development Center (NGO).

Also in the same Adolescent Development Centres, UNESCO, with the cooperation of UNFPA and UNICEF, is conducting a series of 4 related distance-learning courses for both parents and adolescents, with the aim of increasing communication within the family. In the Sexuality Education course parents learned how to conduct sexuality education with their children, and adolescents from the same family studied a course on Child Rights, during which they were trained as child facilitators and peer educators. An in-service teacher training course on Career Counseling for teachers and a Life Skills programme for the adolescents complete the sequence.

Working within the existing health service, WHO is concentrating on training health professionals to be sensitive and responsive to adolescent needs, on developing an Adolescent Friendly Health Standard, and on re-vitalising Adolescent Health Cabinets. UNFPA is focusing on sexuality and reproductive health education within schools, and establishing Future Threshold Centres, which provide not only information and counseling on reproductive health issues, but also diagnosis and treatment. Both agencies have developed attractive and accessible IEC.material, which is widely disseminated and displayed in the ADCs, the Adolescent Health Cabinets and the Future Threshold Centres. Both WHO and UNFPA provide opportunities for adolescent participation in the process, through Adolescent Consultative Boards (WHO) and Teen Boards (UNFPA).

Narangerel, a teacher in Arbulag, a remote village in Mongolia’s most northern province of Khuvsgul, describes the levels of participation that are taking place in her school, since it has been chosen as one of the pilot schools for ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents’.

"Our statistics show that most adolescents in our school have participated in the various activities which have been initiated within the project. Adolescents feel the need to focus on something and to be useful. Since we have targeted them, behavior has radically changed because of this focus.

"Training has been conducted for all the staff on the various elements of participation in "Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents" and we in turn held training for all the parents to introduce the project. The local Governor, the School Director, the social worker and the school doctor have all been participants in training by different UN agencies. This project has focused us all on the same thing."

**The Adolescents Board – “Our Voice is Important”**
Adolescent participation in every aspect of community life, including decision-making and public policy, is the hallmark of a healthy society. It is therefore essential to create structures, which can act as channels for the opinions of adolescents at local and national levels, which are recognized and respected by individuals, institutions and the community. The Adolescent Board at the national level, Students Councils in schools, and Adolescents Consultative Boards and Teen Boards for adolescent clinics at local level have been set up to fulfill this function. Young people who have been serving on these bodies, speak of the valuable skills which they have developed, which are relevant to many other areas of their lives, and of the respect which they enjoy from the community as a result of their participation.

The Adolescents Board was created to advise the Inter-ministerial Task Force on the planning, implementation and monitoring of ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents’, and ‘to ensure that adolescent participation both in decision making and in implementation of activities reaches the desired level’. Though it is responsible only for the 17 pilot schools, it has established a relationship with Government Ministries, local authorities, NGO’s and the media in adolescent issues and is often asked to speak on behalf of all Mongolian adolescents. It is providing an example of an advisory body, which represents adolescents at a national level, and could be a channel by which adolescents can have an influence on national policy.

Within the Adolescents Board itself, four sectoral working groups have been created, for Health, Education, Reproductive Health and Information. Within these categories the members of the Board take part in peer education, advocacy, and monitoring of Students Councils and other initiatives in the project sites. The Board was asked to give input to the Government National Plan of Action, was consulted by WHO in the formation of its plans, and in the designing of youth friendly health education materials In September 2002 they cooperated with the Ministry of Health in a campaign for healthy behavior, by participating in a series of TV programmes and by advocacy in schools. The Scouts Association of Mongolia provides guidance and support to the Board.

Of the fifteen members, some were recommended because they were active within nationwide youth organisations, such as One World, the Red Cross, the Scouts, or on the editorial board of UNFPA’s popular youth newspaper ‘Uerkholve’or television programme. Others represent specific sections of the adolescent community. Members include Navantiyeya and Byambadorj, both school drop outs, Munktuvshin, a 17 year old Buddhist Monk, and Bayarbat, who is confined to a wheelchair, each of whom bring a unique perspective to the work of the Board. Each has a story to tell which highlights obstacles adolescents encounter in realizing their rights to development and participation.

Far from being 'child-seeking', many school administrations exclude adolescents who are eager to study, and the atmosphere in schools is often competitive and aggressive. As an active member of the Adolescents Board, Navantiyeya has been raising awareness among his peers and adults, on a wide range of adolescent issues. He is eager to learn and to share his knowledge with others, and believes that it is the right of every child to have an education. Yet Navantiyeya dropped out in the 5th grade and was not allowed back into school for 2 years. He explains why….

“The first time I didn’t go to school was because I overslept and was late, and because I didn’t think it would be good to go late. I told my family that I was going to school, but I went into the centre of the city and did interesting things instead. I did this for two days, and then my teacher went to tell my parents I was not in school. They told me to go back to school and I went, but my teacher was very angry and made me stand for two hours with my arms above my head. After this I didn’t go to school for one month and my teacher did not visit my parents again. They told me that if I didn’t like school, I could stay at home, and at first I was glad. After a month, I tried to go back to school, but they would not let me come back. My grandmother came to the school with me, and the teacher told her that because I
had not been to school for so many hours, I had been taken off the register. My
grandmother tried to get me into Technical School, but I was one year too young. At that
time I was just 14.

Even though I stayed away from school, I wanted to study. Now I am happy that I am
attending a special evening class for drop-outs in the evening, with thirty other teenagers.
We study the same curriculum as the school children, and will continue until we have
graduated from the 8th grade. Schools should not deny any child their right to education”.

The members of the Adolescents Board also reach out to marginalised adolescents in areas other
than the project sites. Adolescent Board member, Bayarbat is 18 years old and is dependent upon a
wheel chair for mobility. As a member of the Adolescents Board he finds that he is able to
articulate the rights of disabled adolescents, which, as the Mongolian Adolescents Needs
Assessment Survey Report stresses, have been ignored in Mongolia, both in schools and in the
community.

"Being on the Adolescents Board has given me the heart to believe in myself and my
capacity to participate in my community and to take action. I used to think that I would not
be able to take part in the life of my society. But now I know that I can take part in planning
and in action. This experience has empowered me, and my life is different. For most of my
life I have not been to school. Most disabled children do not go to school. School directors
and the teaching staff see them as problems, and do not understand them and their needs.
For one year I did go to school, but it was a very difficult experience for me. Although
some of my classmates were kind, in general neither the teachers nor the students
were friendly or helpful, and their attitude seemed to be "Who on earth is this person?"
But we too have hearts, and have as much capacity to study as physically able adolescents.
I believe that there needs to be moral education in the family and in the community so that
people learn to have a positive attitude towards helping others. In schools and in the
community provision needs to be made for the practical needs of the disabled, such as ramps
as well as steps, and lifts. Such provision is made in other countries, so that disabled
adolescents have access to education and their other rights, and it should also be made here."

The Adolescents Board has taken a leading role in 'Telling the UN Story' by helping to make
contact with adolescents who have been involved in the project activities, and encouraging them to
tell their stories both in interviews and also by writing about their experiences, feelings and their
opinions of the initiatives that are taking place within "Improving the Outlook of Mongolian
Adolescent Girls and Boys.” In addition, they have been monitoring the progress of Students
Councils and Adolescents Development Centres in many of the pilot schools and reporting their
findings to the relevant institutions.

Members of the Board have also been active in the international arena. In February 2002, fifteen
year old Bayarbold represented Mongolian adolescents at the Bangladesh Conference on Meeting
the Participation and Development Rights of Adolescent girls, and Delgermaa (16) attended the
South East Asia and Pacific region workshop on "Networking and Partnership between Young
People and Governments on HIV/AIDS", held in Bangkok, Thailand, in April 2002.

Reflections
While it is essential that the adolescent voice should be heard and should influence public policy decisions, putting a young person onto bodies that exercise power is not necessarily the most effective strategy. To borrow categories from Roger Hart’s Ladder of Participation, this can easily be simply ‘decorative’ or ‘tokenism’. Not only are the young people a minority presence, but also co-members are often professionals whose working lives are bound up with the issues in hand. The young people are not up to speed on the matters discussed, poorly briefed and without the skills and experience to be effective. Their inputs are discounted, their interest waivers and their membership lapses. Their disinterest becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

One effective way to consult young people is through such a body as the Adolescents Board, where young people are in the majority. The Adolescents Board has been very active since its creation, and it is clear that such a body has the capacity to perform a leading role in decision making in policy and planning and implementation. Though it has a role only for the project areas, it nevertheless can be seen as a model for an Adolescent advisory body, which is involved in the shaping of public policy.

However, there is a tendency for adults to use the Board as a tool to execute or advocate strategies, which have been determined by adults on behalf of young people, and to arrange programmes for them, which although related to adolescent issues, are not directly concerned with the actual projects being implemented.

The members of the Adolescents Board were selected at the beginning of the project cycle, before any of the interventions got underway, and until recently, none of the members were actually from any of the project sites, and therefore not involved themselves in any of the programmes. This anomaly was only rectified when the Adolescents Board worked with adolescents from the pilot districts in Ulaanbaatar in the planning and organization of a National Adolescents Forum in November 2003. Since this forum, adolescents from the pilot sites have joined the Board.

Nevertheless, the Adolescents Board has been taking the initiative to report to the relevant institutions, which aspects of the project are being well implemented and which fall short of expectations. Their reports on the progress of ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents’ have been perceptive and frank, and boldly delivered to assembled governors, school directors, teachers and social workers from the pilot areas, at training courses in Ulaanbaatar. Members of the Adolescents Board were actively involved in interviewing adolescents for their stories for this present document.

If adolescent participation is to be meaningful, it needs full commitment on the part of adults to ensure that it really is at the centre of policy and practice, and not simply a symbol. Although much has been done to open the minds of adults to the role that young people can play, it will take more systematic effort to bring about a radical change of attitude, particularly among adults at national policy making level who need to develop a willingness to take time to listen to the adolescent voice and to adjust timeframes, procedures and approaches accordingly.

Part 2: PARTICIPATION - FOR LASTING CHANGE.

UNICEF supported initiatives
Participation is woven into the fabric of the Convention for the Rights of the Child. It is not merely a strategy or a tool, it is a human right. Young people have both the right and the ability to exercise choice and to influence policy in matters that affect not only themselves directly, but their society as a whole. The involvement of young people is essential for the healthy development of communities. Adolescents should be seen not as citizens in waiting, but should be respected as active citizens now.

Yet Mongolian adolescents in the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey Report said that they are Rarely given the opportunity to participate in the decision making process in their family, their school, or their community. They feel that adults expect them to be passive and see them as problems if they ask questions and express their opinions. There are no out of school activities, no suitable places for young people to meet and they do not have the confidence or skill to express themselves freely or to take the initiative in organizing themselves. For a variety of reasons there are many adolescents who drop out of school completely, and many adolescents with disabilities are not given the opportunity to attend school or to participate in the life of the community.

While each of the UN agencies aim to increase adolescent participation at every stage of the programme cycle, participation itself is the issue, which UNICEF has chosen as its focus. Since a large part of the time of most adolescents is spent in school, it made sense to concentrate initially on this arena, with the aim both of increasing the participation of in school adolescents and bringing out of school adolescents back into school.

A number of inter-connected and mutually supportive initiatives were set up in the pilot schools, each of which was designed to give adolescents both the context and the skills to enable them to increase their participation in all aspects of the life of the community.

These initiatives include:

- the establishment and training of an Adolescents Board at national level, to advise on the planning, implementation and evaluation of the project and to ensure adolescent participation in every aspect of the project
- the training and development of democratically elected Students Councils, which represent the student body and give it a voice
- the ‘My Passport’ Participation campaign which provides young people with the opportunity to develop the skills and capacity they need to play an active role in the life of their community. In its second year it was introduced into secondary schools nationwide.
- the establishment of Adolescent Development Centres, which provide a place for young people to meet
- the development of guideline manuals covering many aspects of the establishment, administration and organization of informal youth associations and youth NGOs, for use in the training of members of Students Councils, teachers and social workers in participatory activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Some Obstacles to Participation identified by Mongolian Adolescents</th>
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<tr>
<td>➢ We do not have confidence in ourselves</td>
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<td>➢ We do not have the skills to initiate and sustain activities</td>
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<td>➢ We do not have access to enough information</td>
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<td>➢ Adults do not respect us</td>
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<td>➢ Adults expect us to be passive and see us as problems if we express our opinions</td>
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<td>➢ We have nowhere to meet</td>
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<td>➢ There are no out-of-school activities</td>
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<td>➢ Schools are uncomfortable and unfriendly</td>
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• the launching of ‘My Site’, Mongolia’s first web site for adolescents, in June 2001. Created by a team of adolescent volunteers, working with the Mongolian Youth Development Centre (NGO), it keeps young people up to date with information from the Adolescents Board, news of the project activities and a variety of adolescent issues. Interactive pages invite adolescents to express their opinions and to ask questions.
• ‘Kid to Kid’ project is a series of videos about adolescent issues, being made with the participation of young people themselves, under the guidance of the MYDC (NGO) in partnership with UNICEF, UNESCO and UNFPA.
• Revitalising and democratizing School Management Boards to increase community participation.
• Renovating four school and dormitory buildings, to provide a comfortable and healthy learning environment.

As a result of these initiatives in the 17 pilot schools:

• About 470 adolescents are elected to Students Councils each year in the pilot areas.
• 63,000 adolescents have taken part in the ‘My Passport’ participation campaign and formed 4,100 groups in two years.
• 17 local Adolescent Development Centres have been established, with a total of 59 rooms.
• Two aimag level ADC’s have been set up, modeled on local ADCs, and a third is planned.
• About 16,000 adolescents organize and participate in Adolescent Development Centres in a single season.
• 209 new youth clubs have been established and are being effectively organized.
• 1,700 adolescents have been active agents or have been elected to office within youth associations established during the project.
• The new Education Law increases community involvement in Schools Councils.
• About 200 adolescents have returned to school as a result of renovations.

All of these projects link with initiatives supported by UNESCO, WHO and UNFPA in the same pilot communities. The Director of the Ireedui School Complex in Murun, Khuvsgul, testifies to the major changes that have taken place since the various programmes of ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls (and Boys)’ have been implemented there.

"The adolescent project has helped us to become more organized and disciplined, both teachers and children. The Student Council has made a big difference to the atmosphere in the school. Many of the teachers used not to be friendly with the students. They saw teaching only as passing on information and saw themselves as the leaders of the class. After many years of authoritarian approach in the classroom, the teachers were used to organizing everything and talking all the time. With the coming of the Student Council we have begun to realize democracy within the school. Things are slowly changing. I now meet with the students as well as the teachers and they come to speak to me about their problems. The students now understand that they can be active participants in their education and they have learned to express their feelings openly with adults.

The 'My Passport' participation campaign has been very successful, and as a result the quality of education in the classroom has increased. Adolescents are now much more able to achieve results in any activity initiated by themselves. My Passport has had a very big impact, and we have advised students that they should organize similar activities themselves on their own initiative."

*(Photo of Adolescent Development Centre in Murun)*
“Before this year there were no activities after school, and we did not know how to spend our free time. In this project I began to participate in all kinds of activities and learned to work in a group and to help others. We shared experiences. In the classroom we became more open with teachers, and we began to work very closely with them. We taught our peers and children from the kindergarten. We helped single mothers and old people with the housework and carried water and chopped wood for them. I really liked that – it feels so good to be helping others. Before My Passport, even if we had wanted to help we didn’t know how to, or how to express our feelings. Now we know how”.

Amarghan (15), Ik Tamir soum

Student Councils

It is at the local level that young people’s participation is likely to have the most immediate effect. The parents of today’s adolescents grew up in a society where housing, health care, education and employment were provided for all, but in which individuality and self expression were suppressed. The new political system has given people a choice and a voice. However, a decade after the transition to a democratically elected government, Mongolia’s Adolescents made it clear in the MANAS Report that they did not feel that they had adequate opportunities to take part in the decision making process that affects their lives, either in the family or in their community, and that there was no formal channel for their voices to be heard.

To meet this need, democratically elected Students Councils have been set up in the 17 pilot schools which are proving to be an effective channel for adolescent opinion and participation at local level, and are already having an effect on school policy in many schools. Students Councils are not new to Mongolia. During socialism every school had its Student Council appointed by the school authorities. Since transition, the practice of establishing Student Councils has fallen into abeyance in many schools, or where it has been continued, the Councils have been appointed by the school administration, and have been largely token and inactive.

In an effort to build on a framework of existing structures, the Scouts Association Community Development Units took on the task of reintroducing Students Councils and transforming them into democratically elected bodies, to be a channel for the student voice, and a guide and stimulus for increased adolescent participation.

School Directors, teachers, social workers and adolescents participated in training workshops in the organisation of Student’s Councils, in the planning of open and free elections and the need to give an active voice to the Council in school affairs. The training aimed to build capabilities among the adolescent participants, to fulfill the functions of leadership, organisation and management.

“The training also included the encouragement of imaginative activities and youth associations to attract the participation of the student body. In a parallel initiative, two well designed and easily understood training manuals for young people, were developed by the MYDC (NGO), providing guidelines in every aspect of the establishment, organization and management of youth initiated associations and youth NGOs. As a result there has been a proliferation of 209 new youth clubs, which have been set up and are being systematically organized in the pilot schools.”

Myngathayer (16), Erdenemandal, Arkhangai
Both adolescents and teachers testify to the transformation that has taken place within their schools as a result of the focus of the Students Councils. They describe a new confidence in students to express their opinions, to take responsibility for transforming their own lives, and a new willingness of the teachers to acknowledge and respond to the concerns of the students.

When adolescents feel free to express their own opinions and feelings, the dynamics of the relationship between teachers and students changes. There is more trust – it is no longer a question of ‘them and us’. Teachers have more respect for the students, and recognise that they themselves are also in a learning situation, while students are more appreciative of the contribution that teachers are making to their development.

“I used to think that my main duty was to learn the information that my teachers gave me, as well as possible, but now I understand how important it is to express my own opinions and feelings, and to be involved in different aspects of society, and that our voice is important. We can do many things for our society. Because of this understanding, many things have changed. For example we used to keep it secret from our teachers when we organised a graduation party, and our parents were always worried about us during that time. But this year, we wanted our teachers to share our party, and we had a great time together. Our parents weren’t worried at all.” Myngatbayer (16) from Erdenebulgan, Arkhangai

Each Student Council has provided a Post Box in the Adolescents Development Centre, in which all students are invited to post their suggestions, criticisms, complaints etc. and the members of the Council regularly read them, record them and present them to the school administration on behalf of the Students. One example of the effectiveness of this strategy is the changes that have taken place in the school in Khotont soum, Arkhangai, where many teachers used to smoke in the school. Suggestions in the Post Box revealed that many students disapproved of this and wanted the school to be a smoke free zone. The teachers respected the wishes of the students and agreed not to smoke within the school. In the same school, the teachers used to have a staff meeting in the middle of the day, which would frequently cause them to be up to 20 minutes late for their classes. There were many student complaints about this, which the Student Council presented to the teachers, and now the practice has changed and teachers are careful to be on time for classes. That the quality of work in the classroom has improved was noted by many students and teachers.

(Photo- using the Post Box, Erdenemandal)

Zolzaya (15), a member of the Students Council, in Erdenemandal School, Arhangai, highlights the new atmosphere of mutual respect that has been created in the classroom, and the cooperation not only within each class but also between classes.

“Usually every Monday we have time when we discuss class activities. Our teachers used to lead these sessions and were usually very angry and critical of our behaviour. After the Students council was elected, two members of the Students Council led the class time sessions instead. Now teachers still attend the class sessions, but they don’t talk all the time and they are friendly and respectful. They encourage the members of the Student Council to tell the other students about their Council’s plans and the out of school activities that are being organized. We used to have nothing to do with other classes, but now, because every class has a member of the Student Council, students in different classes work more closely with each other as well as the members of the same class.”

Ariunzuul (14) points out that not only the teachers, but also the members of the Student Council, in Murun Complex, No 2, have been made aware of the need to adjust their behaviour by opinions expressed through the Post Box.
"We also had complaints in the Post Box that the members of the Student Council were becoming very impolite to others and behaved aggressively with other students when the classrooms were dirty and such like. But the Student Council accepted this complaint very positively and members are now trying to adjust their behavior."

The Students Councils have also begun to take the initiative in helping young people to take responsibility for aspects of their own lives. In Murun, the provincial centre of Khuvsgul aimag, Munkentsetseg (16) described how the actions of the Students Council improved access to health care for the adolescents in her school:

"All students have a desire for leadership and are very happy to have their own, independent Student Council. Before we used to do everything because the teachers told us to do it, but now we feel the power within ourselves. One example of action that we have taken is that many of the students in our school did not have health insurance cards, and when we were told by our school doctor that with an insurance card every student has a right to free health care, the Student Council helped every student to get health insurance cards. After this, as part of 'My Passport' campaign, in the health section, every student in the school went to the dentist and the Student Council organised a special day for each class. Even our parents did not seem to know about free treatment"

Adolescent Development Centres – a space for exploration

In the Mongolian Adolescent Needs Assessment Survey young people reported that they have nowhere to meet for out of school and adolescents initiated activities, where they can explore and exchange ideas, learn to express themselves and develop their latent capacities. The absence of such a meeting place, and the lack of extra curricular activities, is seen by many adolescents as the reason that many take up bad habits, such as smoking and drinking.

Due to the large number of students, and limited capacity of the buildings, Mongolian schools currently take two shifts of students, morning and afternoon. Some even have three shifts. All children are required to leave the school when their shift is over, and the school is not normally open for the students in the evening. There is no appropriate place for young people to go when their classes are over, except home.

In response to this need, MYDC (NGO) supported by UNICEF, is helping the pilot schools to establish Adolescents Development Centres. In some schools, spaces have been reclaimed from corridors, cloakrooms or alcoves. In others, rooms which had previously functioned as a concert hall or a sports hall, or a canteen, have been designated Adolescents Development Centres, and may incorporate an adolescent health cabinet, where young people can go and discuss their health concerns, a library and even a school FM radio station. In a number of cases local companies and parents helped with financial contributions, or provided labour and materials. UNICEF has provided each Centre with a TV, a VCR, a video camera, and a music centre, and resource materials and information on adolescent issues have been supplied from UNESCO, UNFPA, WHO and UNICEF.

All the ADCs are intended to be open after school hours, and to be accessible to all adolescents. They are overseen by social workers, who are trained to work with disadvantaged adolescents. In many cases non-formal education centres are being transformed into Adolescent Development Centres, and an aspect of the ADC's function is to work with out-of-school adolescents to
encourage and to tutor them back into the formal education system. School doctors working in local clinics are in touch with the social workers to provide adolescent friendly health information and services.

The Adolescents Development Centres are not always spacious, but in many cases they are vibrant with energy, manifest in the handcrafted posters, schedules, information boards and displays that cover the walls and spill out into the corridors of the school. The effect on the lives of the young people who use them has been considerable. A sense of ownership and a corresponding sense of responsibility have been generated that is empowering and energizing to both the students and their teachers. Where members of the community have been involved in creating these spaces, this is even more the case. Fifteen year old, Orkhontuya tells how the attitudes of her parents changed, and as a consequence, the atmosphere within her family, because of her father's involvement in creating the Adolescent Development Centre.

“When I was elected onto the Student’s Council, I would arrive at my home very late and very tired. My mother would tell me I was wasting my time and that I should be doing the housework and my home-work. She just thought that I was playing outside with my friends. But when the time came to decorate a room in our school as an Adolescent Development Centre, my father came to help and he began to understand what I was doing and he told my mother not to criticize me, because what I was doing was very important. After that my parents became very proud of me. My older sister is in UB and our mother didn’t understand her and they always quarreled bitterly. But now my parents understand that such an atmosphere is very damaging and they try to be very positive. Now, when I have trouble with my homework, I ask my mother to help me, which I did not do before.”

A glance at the walls and the table displays in most of the Adolescents Development Centre will indicate to even the most casual observer the proliferation of out of schools activities that has taken place. As a result of training conducted by the Mongolian Youth Development Centre to encourage the establishment of youth initiated clubs, associations and NGO’s and to provide guidelines for their management, about 210 new clubs have been set up, involving an estimated 16,000 children in the 17 pilot schools, all of whom have experienced the exhilaration of discovering the creative and intellectual potential that is latent within them, and of discovering more about themselves, their fellow human beings and the environment within which they live.

The "My Passport" Participation Campaign –developing the skills

What ultimately counts for young people is their own life experience and what they make of it. The local contexts of home, school and community are the most appropriate arenas in which they can gain such life experience. While the Adolescents Board, the Student Councils and the Adolescent Development Centres provide institutional structures, to increase adolescent participation through representation, administration, organization and encouragement, there nevertheless needs to be a nurturing environment in which young people can expand their horizons, experiment with their powers, and explore their capacity to make informed choices, based on fundamental moral and spiritual principles. Much of this exploration will take place outside the classroom, in the third arena of extra curricular activities. It is here that the skills of participation
and cooperation, of reaching out to others, of taking the initiative and learning to plan and organize, will develop.

Yet, according to the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey Report, 77.8% of adolescents are living in an environment that is not conducive to encouraging their participation or to expressing themselves. If they ask questions in the classroom, they are likely to be treated as ‘problem students’, and the favored student was understood to be passive and studious.

Very few young people have the opportunity to participate in youth clubs or cultural activities, and the out of school activities which scored the highest percentage from the surveyed adolescents were housework (46.2%), reading books (42 %), doing lessons (40 %) and listening to music (28 %), all of which are solitary activities. Consequently they often feel lonely and isolated, both at school and within the family.

In response to this need, it was this third arena that the ‘My Passport’ participation campaign focused on, mobilizing over sixty three thousand adolescents, and more than 4,100 organically formed groups to cooperate in a wide variety of self-initiated activities that ranged from organizing dramas about HIV/AIDS prevention, to helping school drop outs to return to school.

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Launching, by the Mongolian Youth Development Centre (NGO) on Mongolian Independence Day, November 26th 2001, it has been successful far beyond expectations, in encouraging thousands of young people to cooperate in groups; to actively involve themselves in helping others; to consciously develop their own potential, by seeking out information, and by sharing this information with their peers.

"Even if you do something very small, it makes a difference"  Badamlinghua (14)

These activities have succeeded in transforming the school environment; in building confidence, skills and qualities of leadership among thousands of young people; in radically changing the attitudes of teachers and other adults towards adolescents and in increasing participation and the number of out-of school activities for young people. The Prime Minister of Mongolia, Mr. N Enkbayar, aware of the widespread effects of the campaign, declared that the 'My Passport" campaign should be adopted nationwide and conducted in every school throughout Mongolia, under the guidance of the government agency, the National Board for Children. In the second year of the Campaign more than 50,000 young people were involved in more than 3,500 organically formed groups in 600 secondary schools in 21 aimags.

"I hope that My Passport will become more widespread because those who have participated have become much more skilled and will work harder to contribute to their community in a more thoughtful way. The fact that we developed ourselves
was the real pleasure, not earning medals, which is not nearly as important as our development. My attitudes have changed and so have the attitudes of my parents. They began to understand us and put themselves in our places.”

Capturing the Imagination of Youth  

The 'My Passport' campaign uses the metaphor of a Passport for Life, in which the 'tickets' are initiatives taken in six areas of activity. These areas are My Participation, My Health, My Development, Service to others, Information and Communication, and Reproductive Health. Participants were invited to form organic and informal groups in which the members would cooperate in organizing the activities that had been chosen from the tickets.

Parents and teachers were encouraged to participate and take an active interest. Training sessions were held for social workers and student leaders involved in facilitating the campaign and once it was underway the central team at the Mongolian Youth Development Centre continued to assist local teams with methodology, managerial guidelines and information.

It is a simple mechanism, based on tried and tested learning structures used by Scout Associations throughout the world. The passport for life metaphor captures the imagination of young people, and there are incentives in the attractive framed certificates that are awarded to each group based on the number of activities. But though the initial incentive may have been to win an award for the group, the activities for many adolescents become ends in themselves, as they begin to feel the liberating and empowering affect of increasing their skills, seeing the successful results of their initiatives and of being of service to individuals and their community. My Passport has been a catalyst to encourage the participation of thousands of adolescents, most of whom had previously not participated in any out of school activity. The universally enthusiastic response of adolescents involved in the campaign, coupled with the reports from teachers and school administrations of the raised level of classroom achievement, indicates that the enormous learning potential of out of school activities is beginning to be appreciated.

"'My Passport' encouraged us to learn well. At first our parents didn’t like it, because they thought we were wasting too much time and they thought we should spend more time doing the housework. But when they realized that it was a good programme that it gave us a sense of purpose in life, they began to be more tolerant”. Amgalan (15)
Adolescents from the pilot areas, both in school and out-of-school, are invited to form an organic group of friends, neighbours or interest groups. There are registration forms for each group. Each participant is given a passport and a series of ‘tickets’, which list a number of suggested participatory activities that may be chosen, with six topic areas. The teams then choose the activities in which they would like to be involved. Within the frame of ‘My Passport’ the six topic areas are:

1) My Participation  2) My Health  3) My Development
4) Reproductive Health  5) Service  5) Information and Communication

In each pilot area, one co-ordinator, with some experience of working with young people, was appointed to advise and assist the adolescent participants.

The activities are conducted, recorded in their passport and for each activity there is a page for comments and reporting of the activity by a responsible adult who has been associated with the activity, who signs and stamps the ‘visa’. There are guidelines for these adults, which emphasize the purpose of these activities and the importance of truthful reporting. The team can include any other relevant material with their passports, such as photographs, plans of action, or paintings and send these to the local co-ordinator.

Awards for team achievements, were announced and presented on Children’s Day, June 1st, 2002

- Bronze - awarded when a team conducts 15 different activities from 4 different topic areas.
- Silver - 25 different activities from 5 topic areas
- Gold - 35 different activities from 6 topic areas

The My Passport campaign was widely publicized through television, radio and in the newsletters of major youth organizations, and by the distribution of posters and leaflets in pilot schools.

An additional channel for an exchange of news of the project activities has been Mongolia’s first youth web site, ‘My Site’ (http://www.my--site.mn) which was created and is regularly updated by a team of adolescent volunteers, working with the guidance of two full time workers at MYDC.

**Insert**

**Ticket to Service for Others**

1. Regularly visit an elderly person and talk to him/her about his/her experiences. Help by fetching water, preparing wood, collecting fuel, and offering to clean the home.
2. If there are pre-school age children in your community who are not able to go to kindergarten, help them to prepare for school by giving them simple lessons.
3. Chose one or two people of your own age who have dropped out of school, teach them some of the basic skills that they need, and encourage them to come back to school.
4. Make friends with one child who is homeless, orphaned or from a vulnerable family, and find ways of helping them.
5. Invite a disabled child to join your group and to participate in all the activities, which you are organizing.
6. If you know of children who are breaking the law, try to help them to respect the law.
7. Organise an activity to clean up the environment in which you live, whether it is a dormitory or the building you are living in.

**Ticket to My Health:**  (Insert)
1. Ensure that each member of your group has good daily dental hygiene. Each member of the group visit the dentist for a check up, and have any treatment that is necessary.
2. Designate one area of your school, street or dormitory as a healthy area. Make it a no smoking area, and keep it clean and litter free. Keep a constant check on it.
3. Participate as a group in some sporting activities or sports competitions
4. Organise a day to raise awareness of the need to protect adolescents against the harmful effects of alcohol. Organise a number of participatory activities on this day, such as dance or drama.
5. Organise a No Smoking day to raise awareness of the risks of smoking. Use a variety of participatory methods to involve other people outside your group.
6. Find someone who is an expert in First Aid and organize a training for all the members of your group. Organise a training for at least one other group.
7. At least four times in the school year organize trekking, hiking or biking for your group in the countryside.
8. Find someone who can teach your group how to prevent respiratory infection; learn how to administer oral rehydration therapy. Then train others.
9. Find out about IDD, iodine deficiency, and find out how to prevent it. Then train others.

Increasing Community Participation in School Management

One of the channels by which adolescents, parents and members of the community can participate actively in the decision making process is the School Management Board. Included in UNICEF initiatives was a programme to reform and improve the effectiveness of the School Management Boards as a process of community participation in creating democracy in the school and mobilizing community involvement in creating a child friendly environment. The old Education Law required that between 51-60% of the membership should be appointed by and should represent the 'Founder' (Government), and the Boards of most schools were found to be ineffective and used as an instrument to realize the Governor’s wishes.

A working group of educational professionals made recommendations to the Ministry of Education, and developed Guidelines for School Management Boards, which form the basis for training for members, and which emphasise the democratic process and community participation.

The working group met the Parliamentary Working Group on Education, and proposed changes in the Education Law with reference to the structure and powers of the Boards. Their proposals were subsequently incorporated into the new Education Law, adopted on May 3rd, 2002.

The working group considered that Schools Management Boards should support and encourage the management of the school, should participate in policy-making decisions; that the members must be familiar with the school, and that more participation from pupils, parents and the community must be sought. Their concerns were reflected in the following changes in the new law:

- The name of School Management Boards is changed to School Council
- The Council should consist of 9-11 members, appointed for a period of three years and should include teachers, staff, students, parents and representatives of other organisations.
- Representatives of the Council should be appointed by a general meeting of the organisation
- Representatives of other organisations shall be selected by the general meeting on the basis of a nomination submitted by the founder (government). There is no mention of any required percentage to represent the founder.
- School Councils no longer have the responsibility of hiring and firing School Directors and Vice Principles. Instead, they may make recommendations to the Founder.
- The duties of the School Councils include the preparation of proposals on policy development and programmes, the establishment of organisational structure, rules and
procedures, the consideration of reports on school activities, the submission of proposals to improve the quality of training to the administration and founder, the provision of assistance to and independent supervision of the activities of the director and the protection of the interests of the teachers, staff and students.

“Teachers representatives will be appointed by teachers’ ballot or consensus, staff from the school (other than teachers) will choose their own representative, student representatives will be selected at students meetings, parent representatives by Parents Councils, and representatives of donors, community members who support the school, private companies, and NGOs will be appointed in a general assembly. It is no longer a government decision” Altanstsetseg, (Ministry of Education)

“School Councils are a main tool of democratic education -the highest level of decision making at local level. The new law decentralises the management from national to local level, and includes students’, staff, and parents’ participation. Education should not be pre-packaged. It is more than filling up a child with information – it is developing the potential that is within each child. This is a central principle reflected in the guidelines.

School is the main arena for preparing future citizens and teaching democracy. If schools become democratized, then society will become democratized. School Councils are the main instrument to mobilize communities to be involved in the education of our children and to participate in the life of the school. At present there is no involvement. Parents give their children to the school and that is all. But democracy means taking responsibility, and it is important that everyone understands that they should be part of the decision making process and should also take responsibility for the carrying out of that decision. This concept is reflected in the new law” Bathuyag, Head of Education Department, National University of Mongolia

Reflections

When young people’s opinions are consulted, when they are given responsibility and are trusted, their capacities are released, and this is reflected not only in their behavior but also in their immediate environment. Many young people and teachers told us that their whole school had become much cleaner, and cared for, since the establishment of the Students Councils, the My Passport Campaign and the Adolescents Development Centres. Students no longer disfigure the school walls, or tear down notices. The school has become theirs, and their sense of ownership manifested itself in a desire to make it as attractive as possible.

Student Councils

Once the pattern of a democratically elected and pro-active Student Council has been established, school administrations are finding that it contributes in a major way to the successful running of the school. Student Council members successfully take on many responsibilities, which would otherwise fall to teachers. Young people respond positively to their peers.

One of the findings of the Needs Assessment Survey was that adolescents felt that they were not respected by adults. The members of the Adolescents Board and the Students Councils and many of the other adolescents involved in the project described how empowered they felt by the consciousness that they were respected by adults and by their peers, as a result of their participation in project activities.

Myagmarsuren (18) from Arbulag, has been out of school for three years because his family needed help with the herds of animals. Now, back at school, he was elected to the Students Council, and he
finds that being several years older than the other students is not a disadvantage because of the responsibility that he is given, and the respect he is afforded by both peers and adults.

"I stayed out of school because my family lives far in the country and there was no one to care for the herds. I really wanted to come back because I liked school and liked learning, so I told my parents how I felt and they let me come back. I was elected to the Students Council, and I really appreciate the respect that I am given by the school administration and the other students. I have a context in which I can share my experience and give advice to others. I notice that students are much more likely to change their behavior because of the influence of other students, rather than adults. It was not easy to speak at first but I learned how to communicate with others in a better way. I like the feeling of responsibility."

Since the concept of Students Councils is a familiar one, and adequate guidance material has now been written, they should be sustainable with a small amount of financial investment from school administrations, and with a continued commitment to training for staff and students in the principles and practices of participation. Although the new Education Law does not refer to Students Councils, Article 45 states that the rights of the student include the right to present requests, proposals, criticisms, and demands with regard to his/her educational institution and teaching staff, and to make proposals on terms and forms of education. The Student Council has proved to be an effective mechanism for this right to be exercised.

One concern is that, without a proper understanding of the principles, which lie behind the concept of participation, the disciplinary role of the Councils will be overemphasized. One Students Council reported that they had a ‘Secret Police’ to observe students and report on unacceptable behaviour. Another, which had organized peer to peer education on the dangers of alcohol and cigarettes, reported that those found drinking or smoking would first be invited to attend a training, and if they ‘offended’ again, their peers were authorized to cut the hair of those found drinking, or wash the mouths of those found smoking, with dung. This authoritarian approach was common in socialist times, which is the recent experience of most of the adults working with young people. Such an approach is encouraged by one of the national youth organizations, ‘Young Policemen’, organized by the Police Force in many schools, which encourages children to report deviant behaviour and the whereabouts of drop out children.

Participation and development are very new concepts in Mongolia, and while there is enthusiasm and eagerness to learn and practice participatory learning approaches, they are not always fully understood and internalised because the conceptual framework, which has been inherited from the past is so different. This leads to an unconscious falling back into old patterns of thought or behaviour. Hishigsuren is one of the three writers of the youth club training manual ‘If you want to be United…’ She found that it is important to have a learning attitude, and recognises how the process of training others forced her to re-evaluate her own attitudes and practice

“An example of the learning process for me was that while I was training adolescents in participatory methodology in organising youth clubs, I noticed that I was not applying the methodology myself. I had written one thing and was practicing another.”

Adolescent Development Centres

The establishment of effective Adolescents Development Centres requires commitment on the part of the school administration to give adequate space, and to make them stimulating, comfortable and safe environments, which are accessible to all adolescents, whether in school or out of school. Some of the most creatively designed spaces are found in impoverished and poorly equipped rural schools, where the ADC was often the only space provided for adolescents within the community. This seems to indicate that the quality of the Centres reflect the level of commitment of the social
workers and school staff, and the degree of adolescent participation rather than the level of material resources. The Adolescents Board has been taking their role seriously, in monitoring the progress of the project implementation within the pilot schools. They did not pull their punches. After the first year of the project their verdict was that, whereas many of the Adolescent Development Centres in the countryside were attractive and functioning well, many of those in Ulaanbaatar schools left a lot to be desired, and were not yet fulfilling their function effectively.

The busy schedules of bookings for use of the room, posted on the wall of many of the Centres testify to the fact that more than one room is needed for Adolescent Development Centres. However, a good beginning has been made. In a number of schools, parents and local enterprises have provided support, and the community involvement increases the effectiveness of the centre. The increased use of community volunteers would help to ensure that Adolescent Development Centres are sustainable.

The success of the school based Adolescent Development Centres has resulted in Adolescent Development Centres being established in both Khuvsgul and Arkhangai aimag Children’s Centre, for the use of adolescents from all over the aimag. The aimag authorities have provided and renovated the room, while UNICEF has provided the equipment. Opened in October 2003, these aimag ADC’s are already functioning, and another will be established in Ulaanbaatar. They provide a model that hopefully will be repeated in every aimag centre and school in the country.

My Passport

‘My Passport’ has been widely acclaimed and it is undoubtedly a success story. It has, in a very short time, involved a large number of adolescents in active and genuine participation. Organically formed groups of adolescents identified what they wanted to do, organized and planned the activity together, and followed it through to realization. In doing so they have developed confidence in their own capacities and learned new skills; generated many informal youth initiated associations; changed adult attitudes towards adolescent participation; had a considerable effect on school environment and policy, and on intergenerational relationships within the community.

"Batnaran was a student who was very shy in her class, but because of her participation in My Passport she became much more open and one day in a history class the teacher asked a question and everyone raised their hands, including Batnaran. Everyone was amazed because she had never raised her hand before, even though she knew the answers. The teacher chose her and everyone was very quiet and listened carefully while she spoke. Now she nearly always raises her hands." Munkzuul (15) Ulaanbaatar

As a result of the success of the Campaign’s involvement of 13,000 adolescents in the first year of the project, by the decree of Mongolia’s Prime Minister, in 2002-2003 it was launched by the National Committee for Children, in schools all over the country. In its second year, ‘My Passport’ involved more than 50,000 adolescents in 3,000 groups. Countless others benefited indirectly from the positive effects of campaign activities in the school and the community. Hundreds of teachers and social workers have been trained in the principles and practice of youth participation.

The Campaign has many strong features. It is a simple structure, easily administered at local and national level, which provides a wide variety of suggested activities, which are imaginative and adaptable to the capacity of young people of any age. The activities are youth-initiated and organized, and participants are encouraged to suggest activities of their own within the six categories, not already listed on the ticket. It encourages volunteering - a very new concept in Mongolia - and involves going out into the community with a very specific development purpose.
It is not expensive, the main costs being printing the passports and tickets, and the training of Student Council members and local coordinators. It does not require paid staff, and relies on local coordinators who are often volunteers themselves, to advise where required and to monitor that the activities claimed by each group have, in fact, taken place.

‘My Passport’ has been very successful in setting up a dynamic framework for adolescent participation. It should not be seen as an end in itself, but as the first stage in the process of increasing opportunities for adolescent participation, which must involve the support of local and national government agencies. The campaign has acted as a catalyst. However, many of the ‘My Passport’ activities are geared towards events, or a process of learning or service that is designed to continue for a limited amount of time, such as a week. While many of the participants have said that they enjoyed the experience so much they have continued the activities, others have said that they have too much time on their hands now it is over and have not continued once the campaign was over. The energy, the enthusiasm and the capacity have been released. To be sustainable there must be strong government commitment to providing a stimulating and safe environment for young people to grow into responsible citizenship, and to giving young people a real voice in the process of deciding local and national policy. Youth NGO’s and youth associations must be supported and their activities seen as an essential third arena for development.

M. Esunmunk, founder of the Mongolian Scouts Association at the age of 20 and founder and Director of the Mongolian Youth Development Centre, has been involved in the planning and implementation of the Adolescents Project from its earliest beginnings in 1999. He has a vision of an expanding area of adolescent participation, starting from grass roots level.

“This project has opened up opportunities for real grass roots community based adolescent participation and show everyone how adolescents are capable of taking part in decision making. The initiatives that have been taken must now be expanded to the national level. The first steps have been taken with the My Passport Campaign. Now many other successful initiatives should be established in all parts of the country, support by the Government.”

“One of the achievements of the project has been the fact that NGO’s have participated at every stage of the project cycle, have increased their capacity and worked in partnership with Government and UN agencies. As a result of a training course for youth NGOs, to which Parliament members were invited, a coalition of youth NGOs was formed, initiated by MYDC and supported by UNICEF. The Government has set a precedent by granting a modest amount of annual funds to help youth NGOs. It is hoped that such support will continue for youth NGOs.”

Mongolia’s contact with democracy and the methodology of child participation is only 10 or 11 years old. In 1990 there was an abrupt change from universal participation in the Young Pioneers, to a situation in which there was no provision for extra curricular activities whatsoever. Many of the more experienced professional youth workers gained most of their experience in the socialist context, and rely on methods and approaches to youth participation that are familiar to them. These are based on competition and authoritarian structures, and emphasize academic or artistic performance. We heard of many competitions that had been organized, and clubs for talented children, though these activities did not feature prominently in the training sessions or the Guideline manuals for youth associations or youth NGO’s. Activities that stimulate without measuring one against the other and which are cooperative, rather than competitive still need to be encouraged.

Part 3: RELEASING THE POWER OF THE INDIVIDUAL
**UNESCO supported initiatives**

**“From a Different Point of View”**

We were late for the celebration, delayed by bad roads and by having to pick up a number of people from their homes on our way. We rushed along the corridor, and as the doors opened onto a large room decorated with banners and bunting, a huge cheer went up and we found ourselves in the midst of a celebration. Parents and grandparents, dressed in their traditional dels, mingled with adolescents sporting costumes ranging from Arabian dancers to New York hip hop. As the piano struck up a catchy tune, two girls in yellow, with spangles in their hair, stepped across the floor in perfect step with each other, and called us to attention. The performance had begun.

For an action packed hour, we watched as four separate groups of young learners sang songs they had written, performed dramas and poems they had devised, and demonstrated their capabilities as child leader/facilitators as they involved us in participatory activities, all focusing on the rights and responsibilities of the child. Parents and adolescents were eager to answer questions, to contribute their ideas, or to take part in a physical activity. The presenters were confident and competent, and we knew we were in good hands.

Songinkhairhan’s Family Day was the culmination of the first two phases of UNESCO’s programme for ‘Improving the Outlook for Mongolian Adolescents’, which had been taking place in this and 32 other similar learning centres in the pilot areas in the aimags of Khuvsgul, Arkhangai, and Ulaanbaatar. The adolescents and their parents, who had created this dynamic event, were from low-income families, the members of which have largely been ignored and not seen as achievers, or expected to contribute to the development of their society. In school, adolescents from these families would not be asked to represent their class, to answer questions or to organize an event.

‘These families were not self confident. They are used to being passive and when we see them being so active and confident today, we need to consider this point. In formal school these young people would have been left behind. If they had been asked six months earlier if they could stand confidently in front of nearly a hundred people and perform, they would have denied it. These distance learning programmes are giving them confidence, and helping them to see themselves from a different point of view.” Sukhtumur, NFE methodologist from Songinkhairhan, Ulaanbaatar.

**Bridging the Gap— Parent-child communication**

**The Background**

Mongolia is unique among the 20 countries engaged in the adolescents project, in that, whereas, in the other countries, only 3 UN agencies are involved, in Mongolia UNESCO joins UNICEF, UNFPA and WHO, in their integrated efforts to improve the outlook of Mongolian adolescents. UNESCO’s focus is education, which it understands to be a lifelong process, involving a new vision of learning, which goes far beyond a commitment to formal education, and requiring innovative delivery systems, designed with the learning needs and conditions of specific target groups in mind. It aims to provide programmes that focus on the actual learning process, rather than ‘academic’ achievement, and which would put “trust in the inventiveness, experience and dedication of educators, parents and community leaders at the grass roots”

Since 1993, when UNESCO commenced a ground breaking and highly successful project with women from the Gobi Desert, non-formal education has been the approach and distance learning has been the means of providing a context in which adults and young people could learn new skills to enable them to cope with the changes and challenges brought about by transition and the
resulting acute economic crisis. Until this project, non-formal education and distance learning were unknown in Mongolia, and it was often misunderstood as a second rate education for the disadvantaged. It was during the implementation of UNESCO’s second project, ‘Learning for Life’ (1997 to 2001) that Learning Centres for non-formal education were established in districts, aimag centres and soums all over Mongolia, and methodologists and non-formal education teachers were appointed and trained.

With this experience behind them, in 2000 UNESCO became one of the UN agencies involved in the designing the project proposal for ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents’, and was able to mobilize the existing network of non-formal education methodologists and facilitators based at soum and district learning centres, to implement the programmes that were devised.

The Programmes

One of the revelations of the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey Report was that adolescents felt lonely and isolated, and did not feel close to their parents. They could not talk to them about matters that closely concerned themselves or their lives and did not get enough information or moral guidance. They said that they received very little reliable information about reproductive health, and had little access to reproductive health services, which were unsympathetic to adolescent needs and lacked confidentiality. In addition, adolescents felt they were ill informed and had no guidance about professions or work that they could engage in when they left school, and that they lacked the confidence and skill with which to handle relationships, to make decisions and to make choices about how to behave within society. They had little real communication with either relevant adults, or each other, and were expected to be passive, servile and acquiescent. Consequently they felt ill prepared for life, and were often low spirited and depressed.

Bearing in mind these factors, UNESCO, in partnership with the Ministry of Science, Education and Culture (MOSEC), and the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour (MOSWL), planned a series of distance learning programmes, the topic areas of which are central to the issue of parent and child communication.

There are four phases, each focusing on one of the topics, which were highlighted as areas of need:

- Sexuality Education
  - The Rights of the Child,
  - Career Counseling
    - Life Skills

Given the lack of effective communication between parents and children, the UNESCO team decided to start by building a support structure for adolescent learning. Consequently, the primary learners in the first programme, ‘Sexuality education’, (April to July 2002) were parents, who learned how to share this information with their children. The second programme was ‘The Rights of the Child’ (December – March 2003) and this time adolescents were the learners, who were trained as peer educators and required to share their new knowledge with their families. Parents were encouraged to be continuously involved in the learning process, to support the adolescents in their studies and to take part in joint activities such as ‘Family Days’.

The third phase was Career Counseling, designed as an in-service course for professional teachers, who were trained to advise adolescents on choices of and preparation for a career. In addition, parents were involved in the training and a separate unit was developed for adolescents to learn craft skills. The final phase caters for adolescent learners with a Life Skills course, designed to
enhance the learners’ capabilities in decision making, building relationships, making moral choices, conflict resolution and problem solving. Each of these phases systematically addresses needs, which were highlighted in the MANAS Report 2000 and each course trains the learners to be educators.

The target group for three of the programmes was 1,554 ‘vulnerable’ families in the pilot areas involving more than 4,000 adolescents. Families were selected on the basis of a number of criteria: they should be low-income families with two or more adolescents, and the parents should not have an education beyond the basic 8 grade compulsory education. Single parent families were considered a priority. The facilitators at the non-formal education learning centres made an initial list of families and the final selection was made by the Working Groups at soum level, headed by the local governors, and ratified by the Working Groups at aimag level. The project is taking place in a total of 33 learning centres in the pilot areas - 6 soums in Khuvsgul aimag, 5 soums in Arkhangai aimag, and 6 sub-districts of 3 districts of Ulaanbaatar.

The Methods

Formal schools in Mongolia are overcrowded and operate a system in which the classrooms are used for two, three, or even four shifts during the day. Desks are packed in straight lines into each classroom, where children are expected to reproduce accurately what they have been told by their teacher. Achievement is assessed by the degree to which the student has reached an expected numerical standard, and schools are assessed by the number of students reaching this standard.

In contrast, UNESCO’s distance learning programmes aim to take education to the learners in their own homes and community environment, and to match the pace and content of the learning to their individual needs. Learners are divided into working groups with a trained facilitator. The groups are small enough to include each member of the group as an active participant.

The learning structure includes:

- Attractively designed and illustrated self-study materials that are appropriate to the experience and interest of the target group. This consists of at least one textbook, and supplementary materials, which the learner studies at home.
- A weekly radio and/or TV broadcast which reflects the issues raised in the textbook
- One or two weekly face-to-face meetings, in which all the members of the group come together to exchange ideas about what they have studied at home, and to further explore it through group activities.

The learners actively participate in the learning process, in the context of activities that are enjoyable and stimulate creativity and cooperation. Devising roleplays, creating collages and wall designs, writing songs and poems and playing games are all an integral part of the learning process. The tutors refer to themselves not as teachers but as facilitators, because their role is to encourage the learners to find within themselves the resources to ask questions and seek for answers, to accept challenges and make decisions, to resolve conflicts and solve problems.

In the spirit of the integrated inter-agency approach which characterizes ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls (and Boys)’, UNFPA prepared a textbook “Are You Listening?” on Sexuality Education, and a text book “Skills for Living Wisely” for the Life Skills course, while UNICEF cooperated in the publication of the textbooks on the Rights of the Child, and the text books for Career Counseling, which were written in partnership with MYDC (NGO). All the textbooks are attractively illustrated, colourful and well produced. The content is presented in a way that is inviting and interesting and made relevant to the lives of the learners.
Radio lessons were prepared to supplement the courses which were broadcast twice weekly nationwide, and as a result UNESCO had requests from many listeners for the courses to be conducted in other aimags. TV lessons were broadcast for two courses in the series and during each course a newspaper was widely distributed among participants.

In preparation for each programme the facilitators are trained in the use of the learning materials, and in the use of participatory, student-centred methods of learning. The training follows the cascade model, beginning with one methodologist and one facilitator being trained from each soum or district. These then become responsible for training their colleagues and counterparts when they return home. School directors and soum governors are also invited to attend a couple of days training, so they have a basic familiarity with the attitudes, approaches and techniques that will be used in the learning process. Facilitators are trained how to plan in advance lessons which have a variety of contrasting and complimentary approaches and activities, and how to stimulate student participation. They learn to keep records of progress, matching the learners’ achievement not against that of others, but against their own past achievement.

In all the programmes, peer education and the sharing of knowledge is a major element, and facilitators learn how to train the learners to facilitate, using participatory learning methods. By the end of each course, not only have a considerable number of professionals and learners been trained in the use of valuable new skills, but many others have been influenced to participate in the changing of attitudes and patterns of behaviour within the family, the school and the community.

**Sexuality Education**

“I didn’t know anything about sexuality – only from the newspapers and TV. That information was always negative and disturbing to me.”

(Uranchimeg 13)

Gendensuren, from Erdenebulgan in Arkhangai aimag, is a single father, struggling to bring up four children. When he was employed he used to drive petrol trucks over thousands of miles of rough track, but now he, like most of his neighbours, has no job, and life is hard. He tells us that in the last few years he had lost interest in his own personal appearance and allowed his hair to grow long, and his clothes to become unkempt and dirty. He had no real communication with his children and was very reluctant when he was invited to be one of the parents to take part in UNESCO’s Sexuality Education programme.

“At first when I came to classes I was very embarrassed, and I felt angry that people were talking about sex education. I didn’t see why it was necessary to teach such things. But I was intrigued that other parents were attending and I talked with them and they helped me understand that it was necessary. So I relaxed. I have a boy in grade 6 and a daughter of 10. When I tried to talk to her about sex education, she first reacted in the same way I did- she was embarrassed and angry with me. But I tried a few more times and she finally opened up and began to ask me questions.”

Gendensuren found that, as the course proceeded, he began to have a new and much more satisfying relationship with his children, in which they began to talk to each other about things that were important to them, in a way they had never been able to do before. He also began to find a sense of his own worth and his capacity to connect with others and help them.

“In this course we were students, and Garvaa was our teacher. Now we have graduated, we can become teachers and teach others and share
our knowledge. We didn’t know each other before, but now we are like one person and we always talk with each other. Most of us are unemployed, and life is very difficult, and it made us feel very lonely from time to time. But now we talk with each other like classmates and we feel much more youthful and energetic. I feel that I am sixteen again. Since I have been studying I have cut my hair and now I like to keep myself clean and smart.”

Gendensuren is one of 1,554 parents who participated in the first phase of UNESCO’s four-part programme - Sexuality Education. Parents, between the ages of 25-50, who had between 1 and 3 adolescents in their family, were selected as learners. The aim was to encourage a closer relationship between parents and teenage children, to suggest ways in which parents can teach their children the information they need to understand their sexuality, and help them explore the major issues involved in sexual relationships and sexual health.

A well-constructed textbook, "Are You Listening?" designed for self study, was developed by UNFPA, and accompanied by a teacher’s manual for facilitators. In addition 15 radio lessons, based on the topics of the course, were broadcast on Mongolian National Radio, twice weekly, and a newsletter was distributed throughout the pilot areas, which linked each group of learners with others in different areas, and gave news of activities conducted by the various groups.

(Insert photograph of UNFPAs three SE books)

Teachers’ training workshops for methodologists and non-formal education teachers were held in each of the pilot regions, facilitated by a team from UNFPA, including the author of the textbook. The programme itself was conducted most successfully from April 29th – June 17th in the pilot areas, and involved a total of 1554 parents as learners, 234 of whom were fathers and 1320 of whom were mothers or grandmothers. In the 1554 families directly involved there were more than 3467 adolescents, and many more young people and adults became involved by contact with the learners’ families, or by listening to the twice-weekly radio programme.

Erdenkhoo Batoyun, NFE teacher in Erdenebulgan, Arkhangai, explains that in her soum they are working with 90 families, most of whom have between 2 and 5 children. They chose learners who did not have a high level of education. Some of the adolescents in the families are studying in school and some had dropped out.

“There are only a few fathers involved – it is mostly the mothers who are committed to learning. We work with the adolescents at the same time. First we teach the parents and then we observe the parents teaching the adolescents. The classes are twice a week for two hours, but often they continue for 3 or 4 hours, especially if there are lots of questions. At the beginning the parents were very shy, because sexuality and reproduction is a very closed subject for Mongolians, and the parents and children had never openly talked to each other, but gradually as the training continued they became more confident and interested. Parents and children learned to discuss the case studies in the book together, and by the end of the course, they understood each other and were able to talk openly. The parents are now very interested in further training for themselves, as well as for their children.”

Batoyun has noticed that among the parents there has been a significant change of attitude.

“When they first began this course, some of them did not seem to care about their children’s development, but after the training they have become much more caring, while those who did care already, have become much more able to show their feelings and to share information with their children.”
According to Batoyon, there are often problems between the teachers and the students in school, but the children would never confide in their parents because they were afraid of their reaction. However the project is encouraging much closer relationships between parents and their children and the attitudes and restraints which separated them are changing. Many adolescents confirm that before this project, parents did not let their children go out, not trusting them to behave responsibly. “Now they are happy for them to be free because they feel that their children have a greater degree of responsibility through education and can protect themselves.”

Many adolescents confirmed that their parents used to insist that they came straight home from school, and did not allow them to go out with their friends. The attitude of their parents began to change during the Sexuality Education course and by the time that the Rights of the Child programme began, parents were very supportive of their children’s activities outside of school, and trusted them to act responsibly.

**Case-Study**

“Ejiltuya has been out of school for three years, and is one of nine children. Her father is an alcoholic and her mother is out of work, and there are 11 of them living together in one ger. In spite of living in such close proximity there was very little communication between the members of her family, and her mother was very closed to her children and very quiet with them, not knowing how to talk to them. Even the sisters of the family had very little communication with each other. Then Ejiltuya had her first period. She did not know what was happening and was terrified. Afraid to tell her mother and sister, she hid her blood covered clothes and sheets away. “I was afraid that I was going to die and I cried myself to sleep for two nights. I thought it was because I wasn’t good,” Ejiltuya explains. “I had really bad backache and I couldn’t tell my Mum. Even though I had older sisters they had never told me that something like this would happen to me.” Then she overheard her mother explaining to her sister, and found ‘Are You Listening?’, the book her mother was studying in the Sex Education course, and as she read it she began to understand what had been happening to her. She plucked up the courage to tell her sister and mother, who realised how frightened she had been. “When they realized what was happening my Mum explained that I was becoming a woman and I have to be clean and wash myself often. It is only bad blood coming out of my body, and that I should not worry. Now I tell my younger sister about these things, so that she will not be frightened as I was. Now I talk much more to my Mum and my sisters. It is good, and we feel more like a family.”

**Rights of the Child**

UNESCO’s strategy was to target families, and while the parents were the primary learner on the first programme, the second programme on the Rights of the Child invited adolescents from the same families to be the primary learners. It was hoped that parents, having experienced the learning process themselves, would be eager to give support to their children in their studies, and would be interested in studying alongside them. While phase one involved parents in teaching adolescents, phase two involved adolescents sharing child rights issues with their parents.

Two illustrated textbooks were produced, with the cooperation of UNICEF, one designed for the 10-13 age range and one for 14-18 year olds. There are four chapters in the textbooks, dealing with survival rights, protection rights, development rights, and participation rights, all of which look at these rights in a way which is relevant to the lives of Mongolian adolescents. This time, in addition to the weekly radio broadcast, four TV lessons were produced, one lesson on each chapter of the textbook.

This was the first time that a distance learning programme had been conducted in Mongolia for adolescents, and there were many unknowns. How would adolescents respond to self-study materials, radio broadcasts and face to face meetings? The programme for the adolescents of the target families was, of necessity, different structurally from the previous one for adults. There were now nearly 4,000 adolescents in the 1,554 target families, and only 80 facilitators, and a new approach was necessary.
Becoming Positive Role Models - Adolescent Leaders

To meet this need, the concept of adolescent leaders was introduced. Facilitators would split the large groups of learners into smaller groups of between 5 and 7, each of which would elect their own leader. The leaders would then be trained to be peer educators for their groups during the face to face meetings.

Leadership is a word that is most often associated with authority and the power to decide and to act on behalf of others. It suggests control and imposition. But the principles enshrined in the concept of adolescent leaders indicate that true leadership is to inspire others, to energise and awaken, to give encouragement and support and to set an example. Fourteen year old Dolgorsuren told us that, as a leader of her group, she is responsible for 30 people, and she in turn trains others to be leaders in a pyramid system in which each adolescent leader is responsible for training another 5, each of whom will, in their turn, train others.

“This programme is interesting because it involves the participation of youth. We have learned in this training that adolescents and children can really communicate with each other and adults. This is why it attracts young people so much. Being able to teach and encourage others is a very nice feeling. First I plan my lesson and conduct it in school, in order to make sure that the lesson works well, and then we go out to other organisations. To begin with, we need to be very familiar with the content of the lesson and when the group gets bored after receiving a lot of information we set up some structured learning activities, which are fun and give us energy and focus. Each leader has his/her own folder, where we keep our documents and our lesson plans.

We have found that other adolescents and adults in the community respect the adolescent leaders very much. We go around to other organisations and they also accept us very well. This respectful attitude towards us encourages us.”

Although the system of adolescent leaders was developed to facilitate groups within the distance learning programmes, they have taken their skills outside the learning centres into their class rooms, into neighbouring families and even into community institutions. One group described a visit to the local hospital, where they conducted sessions for the patients, who received them with enthusiasm. They took all the manuals and posters and showed them to the doctors, who were very interested and supportive of their initiative. They said that patients in the hospital had nothing to do, and the reading materials would be very valuable for them. The doctors even suggested that a room dedicated to child rights could be opened in the hospital.

Introducing Participatory Learning

Both the facilitators and the Adolescent Leaders are trained to use participatory learning methods. A facilitators Guide was prepared, based on a manual produced by Plan International Philippines. It deals with the Promotion of Child’s Rights and Responsibilities, and Children’s Participation in Development in an appropriately Mongolian context. This adolescent-friendly user manual served two purposes; to introduce facilitators to the conceptual framework of youth participation and to the attitudes and strategies which it is necessary to develop in order to achieve genuine youth participation, and it also served as a guide for training trainers and adolescent leaders. Both in the Facilitators Guide, and during the training, it was repeatedly emphasized that the role of the facilitator is to support and assist in the adolescents’ development, rather than to lead.

It was emphasized that the aims of the Rights of the Child programme were not just to inform, but..
to empower adolescents to be able to build their own capacities;
- to become active participants in their own development;
- to awaken adolescents to their responsibilities and give them a sense of their own dignity;
- to put the knowledge they acquire into an active realization of their own rights and responsibilities, and those of others.

Throughout the training course, the participatory, experiential methods recommended in the facilitators’ manual were used, so that the facilitators would themselves experience the process of learning by doing, and the fact that learning can be fun. All sessions were lively and energetic and included:

- Collage making
- Role-play or simulation exercises
- Games and structured learning exercises
- Singing and song writing
- Writing poems, rapping
- Case analysis
- Testimonies
- Seasonal charts
- Data Bank
- Story telling

(Photograph of facilitators at the training course)

These are comparatively new techniques in Mongolia, and for the majority of the facilitators and methodologists this was their first experience of them. During the training course the facilitators, most of whom were also full time teachers within the formal education system, were very excited to discover the potential of participatory methods. “Mongolians receive information better when they hear, see and touch.” laughed one teacher, as she prepared for a role play with her group. “Maybe our left brain is better developed than our right!”.

The learning strategies and techniques that were acquired during the training have been very successfully applied in the face-to-face meetings, and the adolescent leaders have been trained to use them. It is evident from the response of both facilitators and learners, that the talents and capacities of participants are revealed much more quickly when creative approaches are used. In every pilot area both the adolescents and their parents describe the enjoyment they have experienced in learning in this way.

“We have learned things much better in classes in which we are free to move, discuss things and enjoy ourselves. It is lots of fun and some of the structures learning activities are very funny. The teachers are wise and try to understand us. When we don’t understand a certain subject we ask them and they work with us individually. We interact with them. We do not do this in our classes at school. We share lessons with our parents too and even give them tasks, and teach them structured learning activities that are fun. They enjoy it very much” (Otgonbayar 13)

Uuganbayar is 18 years old and is participating in the Rights of the Child programme. He had dropped out of school, but now he has returned, and he finds that the school environment has completely changed during the implementation of ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents’. He describes how his own attitude to learning has undergone a transformation.

“When I studied in this school two or three years ago, I felt it was an empty place. If I missed class, no one minded, no one worked face to face. It was dirty and dusty.
I preferred to be outside. But now things are very different because of the Adolescent Project. I really enjoy the Child Rights programme. Learning in this way is fun. It gives you energy and understanding is easy. I know that the teachers in my formal school did not think that I had much potential. But now that I have returned to school, I have been elected to be the Head of the Student Council.”

Many facilitators report that there is 100% attendance of the meetings from both parents and adolescents, unless illness keeps them away. Learners often request extra meetings, or meet together in their groups between the weekly face-to-face.

“The lessons are taught in such an interesting way, with lots of games and different ways to discuss things and work out our ideas,” explains Ulzi, who is the mother of two teenage girls in Arbulag. “We have never studied like this before, learning with others and having a good time together with many activities that help us understand. We look forward to the face to face meetings every week, and meet together in our homes in between.”

**Case Study**

Fifteen year old Oorintsolmon’s mother left home a number of years ago. She lives alone with her father, who is unemployed and ill with a kidney condition. He is also very withdrawn and his behaviour seems strange to his neighbours, and as a result, Oorintsolmon did not learn any social skills. It was very difficult to communicate with her and she did not know how to relate to people. Her classmates avoided her. Her father became very worried about her and paid several visits to G. Batchuluuun, the school social worker, to talk over the problems he was having with her. Batchuluuun was also the facilitator of the Child Rights programme and Oorintsolmon was invited to participate. When she first came face to face meetings, she was extremely quiet and shy. But after a few meetings, her demeanour began to change. It was discovered that she was a good singer, which nobody had known before. Now she has opened up and is an enthusiastic and active student, not only in the meetings but also in her class at school. She is accepted by her peers. When the Governor told her father that she sang so well, he was very happy and said that he would support her. “I spend a lot of money on unimportant things,” he said. “But now I plan to buy clothes and other things that she needs.” He is very appreciative of what is happening for her. Oorintuya has decided that she would like to be a singer and plans to work very hard for this. In January 2003, for the first time she performed during the New Year celebration concert, and the people of the soum were amazed at the transformation in her. “Before this programme I never sang!” she said “Or at least only at home with my father. I was not very good at communicating with others. In fact I did it very badly. Now all my classmates are my friends.”

These student centred experiential learning techniques are also having an influence far beyond the face-to-face meetings of the programme. Participatory learning is beginning to be introduced into the schools in which the UNESCO distance learning courses are taking place. Many school directors spoke of their desire to encourage teachers to use these methods in their formal classes. Lhamjav, the Director of the Education Centre of Arkhangai aimag, has been taking steps to acquaint all teachers in the area with the potential of participatory learning techniques.

“During the training, participatory learning methodologies were used, which were new for parents and adolescents, and the experience has opened up opportunities for teachers who have been trained to use these methods, to bring them into their formal classes. I would like all my teachers to have similar training and I would like all teachers to use these methods. It would be very valuable for all parents to learn them also, because the result of such an approach leads to a much greater cooperation with their children.

“We organised a meeting for all the teachers, during which we discussed using more participatory methods. We planned that we will visit all the teachers in our schools and try to promote participatory methods and advise them to use them as much as possible. It is clear that while young
teachers have more theory, older teachers have more practical experience, but both can benefit greatly by using these techniques”.

Case Study

In Ik Tamir, Arkhangai, one of the child leaders is thirteen year old Enktuya, whose parents are herders. Enktuya’s facilitator describes her as smart and talented, with all the qualities of a leader. As a result of tardy and ill advised medical treatment after an accident in which she broke her arm, her hand has been cut off at the wrist. Enktuya has experienced disrespectful and insensitive behaviour towards her and her mother, both from medical professionals, and in school, where fellow students laughed at her. Schools enroll very few disabled children.

During the Child Rights course, participants discussed the rights of the disabled, and Enktuya’s fellow learners became very supportive of her and appreciative of her qualities. She was elected a leader of her group, and began to take what she had learned to other families in the soum. Sainaa, owner of Ik Tamir’s local café, says that she regularly comes into the café to share information and activities with his family and their two teenage children.

“I would like to help other disabled children,” Enktuya says. “They also have a right to come to school and to learn. I hope as time passes that I will have a good life and I hope that others will help me. I am not naturally a serious person and I have often not listened to my teacher in the past. Now I am trying to be more serious. Before this project, I never thought about what kind of person I should be. We are poor and my education was not good, and I was disabled. I thought that was my situation and there was nothing to be done about it. But this course has taught me that I can make a big difference to my situation, and help others too.

“When I was elected leader, the other children in my class at school began to pay more attention to me. Facilitating my group is not difficult, and I prepare every session very carefully, with the help of my teacher. I know that if I am to teach others I need to be kind to them. If I am polite they are polite. I need to set an example. Before I used to behave like a forgetful bear, but now I am getting better.”

Career Counseling

The Career Counseling course differed from the other courses in the series, in that it was focused on all adolescents from 8-10th grade in the project schools, and not only for the selected vulnerable families.

Within the course, there were 3 parallel programmes, and three different textbooks were produced with the cooperation of the Mongolian Youth Development Centre and the Education University. These were a text book on Career Counseling for teachers and social workers; a Test Book for adolescents to complete tests which would define their interests and their particular characteristics and capabilities, and suggest the area of work they might be suited for; and a text book teaching Craft skills, to encourage creativity, and imaginative handcraft using local materials.

In general, Mongolian adolescents who graduate from the 8th and 10th grades, have very little idea of what profession they would like to follow, or even what professions there are available. Neither teachers nor parents had been able to give advice. It was clear from the results of MANAS that adolescents had limited access to information about professions and the range of opportunities, which might be available to them. The survey report also noted that, while 17.6% of the sample wanted to be a doctor, only 5.55% of students are actually studying medicine, and though 20.6% wanted to be a teacher, only 13.3% of students are currently involved in education studies.

The course was originally conceived as an in-service training course for 30 teachers, but it proved to be so popular that 1,341 formal schoolteachers have been trained, and many parents have also been involved. A number of teachers who have taken the course have, in their turn, trained other teachers in their schools.
The addition of the Craftsmanship course has proved to be very effective in building the adolescents’ confidence in their creative and imaginative capacities, and has given them some income generation skills. There is very little focus on the use of the arts and crafts in formal schools in Mongolia, and their potential for adolescents’ development is not recognized. In Songinkhairhan, which is the poorest and most populous district of Ulaanbaatar, Oyntsetseg is the facilitator for a group of parents and adolescents from some of the most disadvantaged families, in which half of the adolescents out of school. She reports that there has been 100% attendance in the distance learning programmes. In addition to the recommended participatory learning techniques, Oyntsetseg uses the creative arts in her sessions in the non-formal education centre, and displayed on every available shelf were sculptures, puppets, and objects carved out of wood, folded from paper, straw or feathers, or made from found objects. She receives frequent interested visits from children and teachers from formal schools, whose fascination with the work created by out of school adolescents is breaking down barriers of prejudice, and increasing their self-confidence and sense of dignity. During the National Adolescents Forum, an exhibition of work from the Career Counseling course attracted a great deal of attention from participants and visitors alike.

**Life Skills**

The final course in the series is a Life Skills distance-learning course, which, like the Child Rights course, is for adolescents from the 1,500 selected vulnerable families. Two textbooks, entitled ‘Skills for Living Life Wisely’ – for teachers and for students, were developed by UNFPA, and supplemented by 4 TV and 10 radio lessons. They focus on self-esteem, communication skills, problem solving, stress management, planning skills, organising skills, and managing emotion. A 7 day training course for facilitators was conducted jointly by UNESCO and UNFPA in each pilot area, and at the time of writing the course is about to begin.

“It will serve to quench the thirst of these adolescents for education. Since the Child Rights course they have been asking again and again. ‘When will you have another course which is designed only for us?’”

Oyunchimeg, Project Manager

UNESCO has printed 4,000 copies of “Skills for Living Life Wisely”, 13,000 are being used by UNFPA in other aimags through NFE networks, and 3,000 have been printed for use by GTZ.

**National Adolescents Forum**

In November 2003, UNESCO took the lead, in partnership with UNICEF, UNFPA and the Scouts Association of Mongolia, in guiding the Adolescents Board and a Working Group of adolescent project participants to plan and organize a National Forum to which adolescents from all aimags were invited. During the three days of the Forum the adolescent organizers, some of whom were out of school and many of whom came from the vulnerable families involved in the distance learning courses, proved themselves to be competent and confident facilitators and organizers. Some of the rural teachers confessed that they had been concerned that although these young people had proved their capabilities in their own communities, they would not be up to taking the lead in a national context. In the event, they need not have worried. They were articulate, informed and their obvious commitment and competence as peer educators and facilitators inspired the many participants from non-pilot areas, for whom this was the first experience of adolescent participation.

**‘Kid to Kid’ TV Programmes**

A series of nine television programmes were produced, focusing on adolescent issues and challenges they face, including alcoholism, love and sex, bullying and substance abuse. The Mongolian Youth Development Centre (NGO) organized the production, in partnership with
UNESCO, UNFPA and UNICEF. UNESCO reviewed and broadcast all nine programmes as a complement to the distance learning courses.

**‘The Adolescent’ (‘Usvur Uye’) Newspaper**

“Usvur Uye” (The Adolescent) is a newspaper which aims to raise awareness among the general public about the project, to keep learners from various project sites informed about the activities of other districts, to facilitate the sharing of best practices from the project sites and to convey information from the project team. While the first two editions were prepared by the project staff, the third edition was conceptualized, written and designed by adolescents, and further editions will be entirely adolescent initiated and produced.

“By the third issue it was the adolescents who conducted interviews, chose topics, wrote articles and designed the whole newspaper. It used to take us over a month, but with full participation from the adolescents, it takes much less time”  Sarnaa, Programme Officer

**Reflections**

Although the distance learning courses have been designed for a limited number of learners - 1554 parents and 4000 adolescents – there are many more beneficiaries from the project. These include other members of the registered families, neighbours, classmates and teachers in the schools, and members of institutions within the communities where the project is taking place. The text books are being used not only by UNESCO and UNFPA but also by GTZ and World Vision, which means that thousands more adolescents, their parents and teachers will benefit.

Many letters and calls have been received from other aimags where they are listening to the nationwide radio programmes, requesting that the courses should be conducted in those aimags also. The parents have developed a thirst for learning and are eager for themselves and their children to be involved in continuing education. Parents are especially interested in skills training and income generation, and ask for technical books on carpentry, needlework, felt making and boot making.

Provincial and local government officials are eager to continue the momentum that has been established, and have written to the Ministry of Education to indicate their commitment, but they are able to do very little on their own because of budget constraints. The responsibility for non formal education nationwide is now in the hands of the National Distance Education Centre, and in 2003, the Ministry of Education made a beginning by committing, for the first time, $750 to each soum for non formal education teachers’ annual salaries and activities. It is hoped that this commitment will increase and that non-formal education will no longer be regarded as a poor relation of formal education. The structures, strategies and skills, which have been established by these programmes will not go to waste if the government responds positively and is prepared to adopt and implement them on their own behalf.

A number of local governors declared that they will find some way to continue with the distance learning which is having such a profound effect on the lives of adolescents, their families and the community as a whole, whatever the financial constraints.

**New approaches to teacher training**

During the last decade, the Ministry of Education has taken a number of steps to introduce child-centered education, which is being piloted in a number of schools. In-service teacher trainings on
child-centered education have been conducted and many more are planned. However, at the present time, the education in most formal schools is still teacher-centred, with the emphasis on the acquisition of information, which the student is expected to be able to reproduce to an academic standard set by the education authorities. Many local governors and school directors commented that one of the reasons that the UNESCO distance learning courses have been so successful in their local communities is that the facilitators have been well trained and well prepared. They have been given the tools with which to put into practice participatory student centred learning, and have been taught how to use them.

Dash, the Governor of Erdenebulgan, Arkhangai, recognizes that there is a growing interest in education, particularly among the migrating families who are moving to the aimag centres. Many families who, earlier in the decade, have kept their children out of school to help with family labour in herding animals or caring for the home and younger siblings, are eager for their children to return to school. For this reason, Dash is very supportive of non formal education, which he believes is very much needed, and is very appreciative of the participatory methodologies which are being used in the adolescent project programmes. However, he is concerned that the facilitators and methodologists who have been trained for the distance learning programmes, should not be laid off, as a result of budget constraints, and that the work of supervising non formal education should not be given to the school social worker, or to other teachers who have not been trained. He does not want to see the time and money that has been spent on capacity building go to waste.

It is not only in non-formal education that training in participatory student centred learning is crucial. There needs to be a radical change of attitude within universities and colleges where teachers are prepared. It is hoped that the government’s new policy will be effectively reflected in teacher training colleges throughout the country, and that outmoded, teacher-centred methodologies which are still taught and used in many schools, will give way to more student centred learning approaches. Space needs to be made in the university curriculum for the training of teachers in participatory and experiential learning techniques and child-centred methodologies. The adolescents who have experienced participatory learning, in their enthusiasm, are absolutely confident that teachers will use these methods in their formal education classes once they know about them.

- “Of course they will, because the methods make learning easier. We work and learn together”.
- “They will see that it is a better way to teach, and students understand much more”
- “We learn more this way – the teachers will be very happy to use these methods”.
- “The books are so easy to understand and the content is so close to our lives.”

**Change in the national school curriculum**

However, for student-centred education to be effective, there needs to be a change in the national school curriculum and the expectations that the government has in terms of academic achievement. The present curriculum is very academic in content and necessitates covering a given amount of information with each grade. Teachers are already struggling to get through the curriculum in the time available, and the material is often presented in an unimaginative way in textbooks and is not always relevant to the lives of the students. If the Ministry of Education continues to assess educational achievement by numerical ranking, rather than by the progress of the individual, however committed teachers may become to using experiential learning techniques, they will not be able to put them into practice because of the demands of the curriculum, and the necessity of reaching the required numerical ranking for the school.

This is one of the factors that contributes to schools taking little interest in students whom they do not see as academic achievers, even allowing them to drop out of school because they are seen to lower the school standards. Disabled children are likely to be excluded for the same reason. If the
required standards have not been reached, it is seen to reflect on the class teacher and the school director, and even affects the level of salary.

Many school directors and teachers stress that they have seen a considerable improvement in the formal classroom performance from adolescents who have been involved in “Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents Girls (and Boys)’, and in particular from those who have participated in the distance learning programme, and they are very aware that this is a result of student centered learning techniques. Many of these dedicated professionals have every intention of introducing participatory learning into the classrooms of their schools. There must be a corresponding re-evaluation, at Ministerial level, of the school curriculum and monitoring and evaluation procedures if the increasing momentum of transformation in the pilot schools that is taking place is to continue and accelerate.

Shaalai, the aimag methodologist in Arkhangai, emphasises that these programmes are only the first step in a process of continuing education. “The parents have learned and shared with their children and become more involved with their lives. The children have also learned and have brought their understanding and skills back to their parents. But the success of the programmes is evident in the fact that parents and adolescents are taking action in other ways and with each initiative taken there is a growing sense of purpose, and empowerment.”

One example of someone taking action is Oyungerel, one of the parent learners on the Sexuality Education course, who is taking steps to raise the standard of living in her community.

“Studying on this course made me realized I want to contribute to the development of my community. There is no kindergarten for children who live in the ger district, and my idea is to establish a ger kindergarten for children in the ger district, if I could get some help in providing books and money. UNESCO and our facilitators also gave us seeds. Growing vegetables is a way of protecting our children because the children need to eat vegetables. We even grew flowers, and they were very beautiful. We did other things such as sewing and wood carving, but we need materials to do such things. We have the confidence to do things for ourselves now, but we need encouragement and financial support.”
Part 4: BUILDING ON EXISTING STRENGTHS

WHO supported initiatives to provide Adolescent Friendly Health Services

One of Mongolia’s strengths is that it has had in place, for almost 50 years, a tradition of school health services and a network of adolescent cabinets in district and provincial hospitals throughout the country. WHO, working in close cooperation with the Ministry of Health, recognized that working within the existing health system would build on a firm foundation of past experience and achievement, and would provide a context in which models could be developed which could be replicated throughout the country and which would be sustainable.

The existing system, however, has traditionally been somewhat rigid and not very responsive to the particular and evolving needs of adolescents. Adolescent health has rarely been high on the health agenda, since young people in the second decade of their lives are considered as a relatively healthy group. While much attention has been focused on infancy and early childhood, parents, teachers and health professionals have ignored the specific needs of the adolescent cohort. Typically, they are provided with a subset of health services for adults or children, which is neither adequate nor relevant.

Since transition, the economic changes of the last decade and the resulting erosion of health structures have compounded the situation further and uncovered a health crisis for today’s adolescents, which is revealed in their responses recorded in the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey, 2000.

Addressing this crisis is one of the key components of “Improving the Outlook for Adolescent Girls (and Boys) in Mongolia”. Within this integrated initiative of four UN agencies and the Government of Mongolia to respond to priority adolescent concerns in health, education and communication, WHO has taken the lead role in the implementation of its health component.

Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey demonstrated that:

- 61.6% of adolescents considered the access to health services to be complicated.
- 20.3% thought that services did not meet their needs and 10.3% felt uncomfortable and embarrassed to use these services.
- 9.1% of adolescents felt that they did not trust doctors, and that they were often treated disrespectfully and were given poor health services.

First Steps

“Adolescents live in a world that is very different from the world of health planners. It takes partnering with them on equal terms to make a way into that world and create something that is meaningful to them. I think it has always been our greatest mistake to institute something and expect kids to like it”

Oyun B., Project Manager

From the very beginning, WHO recognized that in order to be effective, work on improving the health services for adolescents should be based on the active involvement of adolescents themselves as agents of change. The first steps which were taken in this process of change were to research and produce two key documents. The first was Health Services For Adolescents, The Way Forward in Mongolia, 2002, which was a review of policy documents and existing health services for adolescents. The second was A Case Study on Adolescent Health and Development in Mongolia 2002. Both of these early initiatives employed a participatory and interactive approach that actively involved adolescent consumers as well as providers of health services in identifying key issues and areas for intervention.
Both studies confirmed the findings of the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey and demonstrated that, although a range of health facilities provide services to adolescents, these services are not geared to meeting the special needs of young people. Throughout all levels of the health system providers lack appropriate communication and counseling skills as well as training in adolescent health and development. It was clear that adolescents themselves are not generally aware of the health services that are available to them. In addition, they are reluctant to avail themselves of the health services they do know of, because it is their belief that many service providers have negative, judgmental attitudes towards adolescents. Poor communication skills lead many health professionals to be dismissive, unfriendly and even aggressive towards young people. For many, the fear that their privacy and confidentiality will not be protected appears to be a major barrier to accessing health services.

“In our aimag (province) a 16-year-old girl became pregnant. Her family found out about this only six months later. Her mother took her to the hospital, but the doctor scolded both of them and even made the girl cry. Soon the entire aimag knew that this girl was pregnant.” Bulganchimeg (15) Erdenemandal soum, Arkhangai aimag

As a result of the research, a number of opportunities for improving service provision to adolescents have been highlighted, and it has been most rewarding to see that there is a clear commitment among health professionals to improving service provision to adolescents at both central and provincial levels of the health system, and most service providers have a very positive and supportive attitude to establishing adolescent-friendly health services. Furthermore, there has been a strong consensus among adolescents that if appropriate services were made more accessible, they would be interested in utilizing them.

The voices of adolescents and the responses of the health care providers served as a basis for the formulation of a concerted and comprehensive action plan to pilot the adolescent-friendly health services (AFHS) approach in three districts of the capital city and two provinces.

“Adolescent-friendly health services meet the needs of young people sensitively and effectively and are inclusive of all adolescents. Such services are accessible, acceptable and appropriate for adolescents. They are in the right place at the right time at the right price and delivered in the right style to be acceptable to young people. Adolescents want staff to treat them with respect, not judge them. They want a range of services, and not to be asked to come back or referred elsewhere.”

Adolescent-Friendly Health Services - an Agenda for Change, WHO, 2003

A Catalyst for Radical Change

Right from the start the overarching guiding principle that underpinned all planning was that any initiatives that are piloted in the area of health services for adolescents are most likely to be sustainable if they are integrated into the existing health structures. This strategy provided a comprehensive and systematic framework for improving the quality of health care by fostering an adolescent-friendly service approach at all levels of the health care system. It was understood that improvements in adolescent health services will

“I feel that sometimes interventions fail not because they are inappropriate or unneeded, but because they are not integrated into the mainstream of the system.”

Dr. Batnasan, OIC of Health Promoting School Initiative, National Center for Health Development
act as a catalyst to improve health services for everyone, as staff attitudes change and people’s expectations of a customer-friendly service approach increase.

A National Seminar on Strengthening the Health Service Provision for Adolescents, was held in November 2001, to introduce the findings and recommendations of the review, and to consult with key health professionals on the issues. Participants concluded that implementing this strategy of transforming the existing health services, called for clear standards and guidelines on adolescent health service requirements. There was a broad consensus among the participants at the seminar that effective policy development at government level was the cornerstone upon which successful interventions could be built, and was the key to sustainability. From the very beginning this was the goal and primary focus which was systematically followed through by the main actors, and the close collaboration between WHO and the Ministry of Health gave further momentum to the process. A multi-disciplinary working group was formed to develop a draft standard and criteria, which involved close collaboration with WHO Headquarters and WPRO experts. Ongoing consultations with various stakeholders involved relevant health workers in the field at every level, and various drafts of the standard were discussed at several workshops.

As a result of the National Seminar, and the subsequent collaboration, an Adolescent-Friendly Health Service Model was developed. This Model was approved by the Health Minister’s Order No. 158, 2002. The creation of this Adolescent Friendly Health Standard and its approval by the Ministry of Health in 2002, was one of the key achievements of “Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents.”

As Dr. Radnaakhand, Deputy Director of Maternal and Child Research Center, and member of the Working Group on the AFHS Model development stated during their consultations:

“It is important to start thinking about the sustainability of the project now. Our earlier experience shows that a policy back-up is a must for the sustainability of any initiative”

The Adolescents Project has further influenced Government policy, in a significant contribution to the development of the Mongolian Government’s National Programme of Action for Children and Adolescents (2002-2010), especially the health component. The project not only provided financial and technical support for the development of the initial draft of the health section, but also ensured that the Adolescent Friendly Health Service approach was incorporated into the Programme.

“We have made big progress – we have moved from pilot to policy right from the start. This alone is a success story of this project.”

Dr. D. Oyunchimeg., Head of Public Health Dept, Ministry of Health

The Adolescent-Friendly Health Service model outlines different strategies for improving health services for adolescents, which are applicable in specific settings such as schools, soum hospitals, family general practices, adolescent cabinets, aimag and district hospitals, NGOs and private practices. Overall, the model aims to build on existing structures and resources, and to strengthen the preventive and promotion components of the current health services rather than establishing new structures or introducing specialized services for adolescents. The rationale behind this approach is the belief that the establishment of specialized adolescent clinics would divert the attention of the rest of the healthcare system from adolescent health issues.

Another important consideration was that the Health Services for Adolescents Review Report (2002) found that adolescents are reluctant to go to a clinic, especially within a hospital, because they are afraid of being labeled and stigmatized as in need of health care. This is particularly the case with adolescent boys, who would refer to the adolescent health cabinets within a hospital as ‘girl
cabinets’. Where possible, Adolescents Health Cabinets were located in other buildings, such as schools or health departments, and given neutral names that were locally chosen. The emphasis was on health information and counseling for adolescent well-being.

“We boys are especially glad that there is such a center here, because it is often embarrassing to go to the hospital, where there are only girls” Davasambu (17)

Interactive Training for Health Professionals

Following the government approval of the AFHS Model a National Training of Trainers in Adolescent Health and Development was conducted, with the aim of training national trainers to introduce the model to healthcare providers and to orient them to the special characteristics of adolescence, and appropriate approaches to addressing some of the health needs and problems of adolescents. A training package was developed which included a number of modules on the significance of adolescence and its implications for public health, adolescent development, sexual and reproductive health, mental health, substance abuse and Adolescent Friendly Health Services.

In her speech which formally opened the training course, Dr. Oyunchimeg D., Head of the Public Health Department of the Ministry of Health, stated her absolute confidence in the fact that the participants had the competence, the sense of responsibility and the power to move the AFHS initiative forward.

The interactive and participatory training course which followed proved to be a novel and liberating experience for all the health professionals who were participating. Gone were the usual rows of desks facing the lecture podium, replaced by walls covered in different coloured cards, on which participants had written reminiscences of their own adolescence. In animated circles, a wide spectrum of professionals working in the area of adolescent health - doctors, nurses, educators and social workers - exchanged experiences and shared ideas. Mid-level health personnel, used to taking instructions from doctors without ever expressing their own opinion, found themselves consulting and sharing their knowledge and experience on an equal basis. As a result, each workshop participant was able to look at the challenges of adolescent health from a wider perspective, and also to appreciate in a new way the role that allied health care workers can play. It is clear from the comments of participants that this collaborative approach revealed a new and inspiring perspective for those who were taking part.

“This training is an important opportunity for us to network. You might think that people working on the same issue in a small aimag should know each other and work each one is doing. But this is not always the case. I am very glad I had this chance to share experiences”
Erkhemjargal G., School Doctor, Tsagaanuuul Soum, Khuvsgul Aimag

“This is the first time I have participated in such an interesting training. The training method used in this workshop helped me to appreciate the benefits of looking at the same problem from different perspectives. It is quite challenging to deal with differing opinions in a constructive way, especially when you have something much easier at your disposal – just criticize everything different.”
Shoovdor B., School Doctor, Songinohairhan District

“It was very unusual for a nurse to sit with a doctor, and discuss things on equal terms. I would very much like to see more of such trainings, and then they would help to demonstrate that nurses have a lot to offer to doctors.”
Ariunjargal R., Nurse, Arkhangai Aimag

“I have participated in one of the most important events of my life.”
“The participants were not bombarded with abstract facts and figures. Rather, we gained practical skills to deal with real-life situations that we encounter daily. That’s what I liked most about this training.”

_Tuul O., Adolescent Doctor, Bayanzurkh District_

“Our goal was to put the needs of the trainees first.”

_Dr. Erdenetuya, Regional Trainer in Adolescent Development and Health_

The national training was followed by a series of similar local Orientation Workshops on Adolescent Health and Development for health care providers, and Workshops on Developing Local Strategy for AFHS Model Implementation at each pilot site. The latter had a two-fold objective: first, to bring together all local organizations and institutions working to improve the health of children and adolescents into one network, and second, to instill a sense of ownership in people directly involved in the implementation of the AFHS model. Workshop participants included adolescents’ doctors, school doctors, family practitioners/soum doctors, medical specialists from aimag and district hospitals, and representatives from aimag and district health departments.

It has been agreed that the service environment for adolescents should be upgraded to the standards of AFHS environment and the need for privacy and confidentiality has been clearly spelt out as a policy. A health facility where young people can enjoy associating with each other and share activities that are stimulating and fun, will be one of the major incentives for adolescents to utilize health services, and the provision of non-judgmental care that is appropriate and accessible will be another.

The workshop participants found the training sessions to be extremely valuable in terms of providing implementing agencies with the opportunity to adapt the Adolescent Friendly Health Service model to local needs and resources. There was a strong consensus at all sites that making services adolescent-friendly is not primarily about making major changes, recruiting new staff or constructing new premises. Commitment and creativity could bring about major improvements even with limited resources: a simple strategy such as setting up an adolescent health corner, by putting up a partition, could make a big difference to the way a young person feels about counseling.

“I have learned more in these days than in my entire student life. I never thought it could be so much fun to learn!”

_Amgalaaan B., Soum Doctor, Undur-Ulaan Soum, Arkhangai Aimag_

“I have worked in soum hospital for quite a few years now. When we first started talking about patient confidentiality, I thought it would be impossible to ensure it at the soum level. I never thought of putting a partition…”

_Ulziibadrakh I., Soum Doctor, Tunel Soum, Khuvsgul Aimag_

(Photograph of young man speaking into the telephone)
A client can press this button, and a doctor next door will pick up the phone to answer his/her questions, if the client feels embarrassed to talk to the provider face to face, Family Clinic, Khuvsgul Aimag

The project conducted three step training on adolescent issues for health care workers, which involved the initial orientation programme on adolescent health and development issues, an in-service and on the job training on AFHS, and a refresher training course on counseling and communication with adolescents, including mental health issues related to personal, family and social life. In addition, a training manual is now being developed on adolescent issues. Many of the recipients of training have taken the initiative to conduct training for teachers in their areas on adolescent health.

“At this center not only we can get health information and advice, but also spend our free time and chat with our peers. Before there was an adolescent cabinet at the district hospital, but kids never liked going there.”

Solongo, (16) Songinohairhan District

Only a year after these workshops took place, remarkable progress has made at the point of service. Adolescent cabinets, previously either non-existent or crumbling into ruin, are now full of life. In one aimag alone, more than 1,000 youth have visited the adolescent cabinet in 6 months, a figure which clearly reflects the popularity of the new model.

(Photograph and caption)
Once a ruin, Adolescent Cabinet now is one of the favorite places for adolescents, Arkhangai aimag.

Building the capacity of health personnel to be more responsive and sensitive to adolescent needs has once again been shown to be an effective strategy. The intensive training for health providers not only improved their capacity level and communication skills, but also built up their motivation for mobilizing professionals and communities to create an adolescent-friendly attitude in the communities.

“With help from parents, we have renovated and remodeled a dormitory building, which has not been in use since 1990. The whole community is very grateful to our Peace Corp volunteer, who has provided 2 million 800 thousand tugrugs for this work from his personal funds.”

Dr. Jigd, School Doctor, Khotont Soum, Arkhangai Aimag

“Earlier I was embarrassed to talk about sexuality and reproductive health issues to students. Now, thanks to the trainings, this situation has changed, and more boys are approaching me with their problems.”

Gonchig, Teacher, Khatgal soum school, Khovsgol aimag

“Our objective for 2003 is to become an adolescent friendly family clinic.”

Dr. Sunjidmaa, Family Practicioner, Khovsgol aimag

"Now we see that if we reach out to adolescents, they turn to us. You open yourself up for them, and they open up. This gives us a great confidence in our work.”

Dr. Tsetsgee, Family Practitioner, Erdenemandal Soum, Arkhangai Aimag

The in-service and on the job training has had a wide effect in mobilizing health and education professionals as well as adolescents and parents, to take the initiative to create an adolescent
friendly environment. In Khotont soum in Arkhangai aimag, where the School Director and the School doctor are involving adolescents, their parents and teachers in creating an adolescent friendly environment, the Students Council successfully petitioned the school administration to declare the whole school a smoke free zone. School No 2 in Murun, Khuvsgul aimag, now provides all classes with a sink for washing hands and have found a way to provide a source of clean water using local resources.

“Now almost everybody speaks of ‘adolescents’. We are learning to appreciate partnership more and more.

Dr. Tseveen, Adolescent Doctor, Chingeltei District

“I can literally see the attitude of parents and teachers changing day by day. School teachers themselves are accompanying their students to our cabinet for health services. Parents are calling for advice even after hours and on weekends.”

Dr. Tsogzolmaa, Adolescent Doctor, Khovsgol Aimag

“This year we have received a number of requests from the Children’s Center, the Education Center and FM stations for collaboration. This is a very promising sign of a change in attitude of other governmental and non-governmental organizations.”

Dr. Oyuntsetseg, Adolescent Doctor, Khovsgol Aimag

“Education and health organizations are actively involved in this project. They’ve developed a joint action plan for two years, which specifically addresses adolescent-friendly environment issue”

Dr. Batsaikhan, Deputy Head, Khuvsgul Aimag Hospital

Adolescent Consultative Boards

One of the most significant developments in the partnership approach has been the increasing involvement of young people as active-dialogue partners in health service provision. Adolescents’ Consultative Boards have been established at all pilot sites, and its members are actively involved in promoting health services among their peers. Davaasambuu is a 17-year-old member of Arkhangai Aimag Adolescents’ Board, who is full of optimism and determination to contribute to building an adolescent-friendly environment in his aimag:

“Initially, we used to bring our peers to our center to listen to music or to study together. Now adolescents know about the center quite well. We, boys, are especially glad that there is such a center here, because it is often embarrassing to go to the hospital, where there are only girls.

Now we are working to promote a healthy environment in our school. We have placed anti-tobacco IEC materials all over the school. At first, students and teachers did not pay much attention, but now even the teachers have stopped smoking on school premises.”

In Khotont soum (Arkhangai aimag), as in many pilot areas, peer educators are involved in teaching health classes to elementary school students. In general, peer education is becoming one important part of a comprehensive effort to help adolescents to make their own responsible decisions. This approach is giving adolescents more opportunities for participation and for learning
in action. Members of some Adolescents Consultative Boards have organised training for adults as well as their peers.

“We teach health classes to younger students. Lately, not only kids, but also adults ask us health-related questions. I think this a sign that our work is being valued.”

Altangerel, 17 years old, Hotont Soum, Arkhangai Aimag

“By being a peer trainer I learn more about myself, I think being a peer trainer is changing me … for the better.”

Bayarjargal, 16 years old, Bayanzurkh District

“I was trained as a peer educator. My friends approach me with a lot of health-related questions. If I can’t answer the question, I consult the adolescent doctor or send my peers to the Adolescent Development Center.”

Ganzul, (15), Khuvsgul Aimag

“We did a survey among students, and a number of students requested our teachers not to smoke in school. I am glad that our teachers have accepted our request, and helped to create a smoke-free environment in school.”

Bat-Erdene, (17), Khotont Soum, Arkhangai Aimag

Members of the Adolescents Consultative Boards understand that health is not an absence of disease, but the presence of well-being, and they are attentive to the emotional needs of their peers and give them guidance that contributes positively to their well being, as the following two case studies demonstrate.

Case Study 1
“...My daughter used to go the school in Bayanzurkh district. During a particular stage in her life she had acne on her face which made her feel very self conscious and she used to complain about it all the time. One of the girls in her class was a member of the Bayanzurkh District Adolescents Consultative Board for the Adolescents Health Cabinet, and she persuaded her to come for counseling at the cabinet. She went and learned how to take care of her skin. After that, she didn’t feel so bad about her face because she learnt that she was not alone in having this problem, and that many girls and the boys have the same problem. Her self-confidence increased. She came home and told me that there is a place where there is a doctor who gives very good counseling. This was my first introduction to adolescent friendly heath cabinets.”

Official from the Ministry of Health

Case Study 2
“There was girl in my class who started to use mascara. All the other girls laughed at her for doing this, and often made fun of her, but she did not say anything and was very unhappy. One day I talked to her quietly about it, and she explained to me that she had a boyfriend who is much older than herself, who insists that she uses cosmetics, even though she did not want to. He threatened that he would leave her if she did not wear make up, and she was afraid that, if he left her, she would never be able to get another boyfriend. So I took her to the Adolescent Health Cabinet for
counseling. After a series of consultations, she decided to break up with this boy.”

Member of the Adolescent Consultative Board, Arkhangai

One of the steps that the Adolescent Consultative Boards took, on their own initiative, was to discover the extent to which existing health services were adolescent friendly, by visiting them as ‘undercover’ clients. They frequently found that they were made to wait long hours while adults arriving after them were received. They were summarily dismissed if they had no health insurance, and were often treated roughly and rudely, especially by the support staff. They would report their findings to the Adolescent Doctor at their Adolescent Health Cabinet, who would go to the hospital in question to offer AFHS training.

“The Adolescents Consultative Board has a student from each school in the pilot area. It’s good to be able to contribute towards making changes for the better. We are doing this for the future of adolescents. We researched how friendly to adolescents doctors are by visiting the clinic as undercover patients. Doctors were usually very rude to us because we don’t have medical insurance. After each visit we discuss with Dr. Tuul, who goes to the clinic and offers training to the staff about how to provide adolescent-friendly health services. When we visit again later we often find that the services have become better. If we go to the hospitals without our parents, members of staff are not friendly to us. They tend to ignore us. If we are with our parents it is totally different”

Urangoo (15) Bayanzurkh District

The Adolescents Consultative Boards in Khovsgol, Arkhangai, and in 3 districts of Ulaanbaatar, have recently been taking part in a two day Evaluation of the implementation of the Adolescent Friendly Health Service initiatives, with a view to identifying how the project interventions could be sustained after the completion of the project. These social mobilization workshops involved district governors, doctors, nurses, social workers and School Directors as well as the Adolescents Consultative Boards. The adolescents spoke out boldly in the plenary sessions, delivering their group presentations with a confidence and enthusiasm, which matched and at times exceeded that of their adult fellow participants.

“Adults usually think that they do not need to listen to us because we are children. If this type of consultation was conducted more regularly things might change. In the beginning of this meeting we could see that the adults were not really respecting us. But we could see this changing during the course of the workshop. We noticed that even their dress had changed from the first day – on the second and third day they were dressed much more respectfully and carefully.”

Sarantuya (14)

Adolescents Design IEC materials appropriate for their peers

In the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey (2000) adolescents indicated that they did not get enough health information, and so WHO set out, in partnership with the adolescents themselves, to conduct a review of existing health education materials for young people. Since the aim of the project was to involve adolescents as much as possible at every stage in the project cycle, both adolescents and health professionals participated as equal partners in reviewing what materials were available.

More than 200 different types of existing health education materials were reviewed with regards to the appropriateness of the content, the language and the design. The reviewers found that the majority of health education materials had been developed with little if any involvement of the target population and do not meet the target population needs as a result. As a follow-up to the review, an international consultant was invited, and a workshop on health education material development was conducted, with the participation of adolescents. During the course of this workshop, the adolescents themselves came up with a number of lively and creative ideas for a
series of IEC materials (posters, pamphlets, and stickers) on alcohol and smoking prevention, and mental and oral health, which they produced themselves with the guidance of a professional designer.

A book on “Teen Health” is currently being prepared for publication and distribution. The 15 chapters deliver, in language that is accessible to adolescents, comprehensive information about adolescent health, and key messages on healthy behavior.

The project has also initiated the dissemination of key messages on adolescent health issues through the use of information and communication technology. As young people all over the world are more and more hooked into the Internet, the use of the ‘virtual space’ is an important new avenue to explore. An Adolescent Health Website (www.owc.org.mn/who) has been developed by a team of adolescents from schools, including deaf secondary schools, and universities, in collaboration with the Open Web Center. The website, which was first launched in September 2002, is being developed under the guidance of the UNDP ICT Team, supported by WHO. The adolescent team has also published the website on CD-ROM and as a booklet for dissemination in rural areas with limited access to ICT.

“There are legitimate concerns that the use of ICT is limited because of the risk of a lack of access for adolescents, who may have the greatest needs. But the Internet is making its way into our lives rather aggressively, and will probably soon become the main communication media.”

N. Hashbat Adolescent Health Website Coordinator (2nd Year student, Mongolian National University)

The arsenal of innovative approaches that are taking place within the project does not end here. A healthy pattern of reflection and consultation is developing, in which sharing experiences of what has worked and what needs more attention, is bringing health professionals from the pilot areas together within a consultative framework. One example of original, yet cost-effective ways for in-service training was a study tour for adolescent doctors, nurses and members of Adolescent Consultative Boards from all pilot sites to Arkhangai and Khovsgol aimags. This experience has brought the value of domestic study tours, largely neglected in the health sector, into the spotlight.

Both of the aimags proved to be most appropriate venues for this coming together of professionals seeking to spearhead a change of attitude towards adolescents and adolescent health. A natural hot spa in Arkhangai billowing up steam to warm up the trainees on a chilly September day, and a big snow-white ship providing a safe environment on a stormy Khovsgol “sea” offered a metaphor for adolescent-friendly services at work. With these people, who believe passionately in their work, in adolescents and each other, the future of adolescent-friendly services is in reliable hands.
“I believe in myself, in the work I am doing, and in the people I am working with...”
(Oyun B., Project Manager).

“The first stage of this Adolescents Project was very inspiring – it was the first example of inter-sectoral cooperation. There has been real progress. Before, there was no adolescent participation at all - we decided everything. We have seen the force of a good example and have applied it to other programmes. We have made changes. There is much to be done to widen the scope, and there have been many different areas that need to be integrated, but we have achieved very good results”

Dr. N. Udval, Vice-Minister of Health, Chairperson of the Inter-ministerial Task Force
Part 5: UNPFA INTERVENTIONS

By Don Hinrichsen

**Focusing on Youth Essential for Development**

Young people dominate Mongolia’s population: one-third is under the age of 18, while a full quarter are adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19. Though average family size has dropped by half over the past two decades – from 6 children per family to 3 – the reproductive and sexual health of young people was not addressed.

The country has witnessed a significant rise in teenage pregnancies, abortions and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) since 1990, due, in part, to the opening up of society. Over half of all STIs occur among young people under 25.\(^1\) Health surveys carried out over the course of the 1990s found that the percentage of sexually active adolescents had jumped from 26% in 1995 to 36% by 1999. Only one-third used any form of contraception the first time they had sex.\(^2\) Fully 9% of adolescent girls surveyed between the ages of 15 and 19 had given birth to at least one child.\(^3\) Moreover, very few adolescents interviewed had any idea where to go to get information or help.

“If youth are our future, then we had better protect them today!”

-- Dr. Dagvasumberel, Head of the Health Department in Arkhangai Aimag (Province)

4. Improving the Lives of Mongolian Adolescent Girls and Boys

Building on UNFPA’s work with adolescents, this innovative project has proved catalytic in assisting the government to:

- Strengthen comprehensive health and sexuality education classes in secondary schools in pilot areas. [The pilot areas include Ulaanbaatar and two provinces (aimags)].
- Provide better quality reproductive health services for adolescents through the establishment of youth friendly health clinics called Future Threshold Adolescent Centers in pilot areas.
- Set up “Teen Boards” to ensure that all activities in the Centers are relevant to and in line with the expressed needs of adolescents.
- Trained Teen Boards members to conduct peer education in adolescent sexuality and reproductive health issues.
- Educate communities, especially parents and local officials, of the need for adolescent friendly health services.
- Increase civic participation of youth and reduce school absenteeism.
- Design and distribute quality IEC materials on sexual and reproductive health aimed at adolescents.
- Redefine the role of “Adolescent Health Cabinets” to enhance the quality of services for youth.
- Support the publication and distribution of the quarterly teen newspaper, “Love”.

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\(^2\) Ibid.

UNFPA’s comprehensive adolescent programme concentrates on four key elements: service provision and training, education, communication/information and community outreach.

### 4.1 Future Threshold Adolescent Centers

The centerpiece of UNFPA’s adolescent programme and a major component in the UNF funded project is the creation of Future Threshold Adolescent Centers. In all, eight Centers have been established: five in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, one in Kuvsghul aimag (province) and two in Arkhangai aimag.

Future Threshold Adolescent Centers provide:

- General health exams for adolescents
- Specialized counseling services
- Comprehensive reproductive health services, including tests for pregnancy and STIs
- Free condom distribution
- A wide variety of information and educational materials
- Concepts and content for local radio and TV spots advocating better adolescent health.

### 4.1a Views from Inside

**The Center in Tsetserleg**

Some 400 kms west of Ulaanbaatar, as the gently undulating steppe evolves into forest-carpeted mountains, the town of Tsetserleg, in Arkhangai aimag, is nestled in a high valley. Tsetserleg was a good choice for one of the Future Threshold Centers since a full 26% of the entire population of 97,000 consists of adolescents between the ages of 11 and 19. Before the Center was inaugurated in June 2003, there were no reproductive health services or information tailored to the needs of adolescents in the entire aimag.

As in most Centers, it has three full time staff: a medical doctor, a counselor and a receptionist. According to Dr. Naranchimeg, the medical doctor at the Center, “many adolescents and young people use our services; the ages vary from 11 to 23. In the period from June to September 2003, for instance, 500 adolescents, mostly girls, used our reproductive health services,” she explains, “while 86 came for counseling and we distributed over 1000 condoms. The only complaint we get is that the Center should be open longer hours.”

The Teen Board consists of eight adolescents – five girls and three boys. The Board meets once a week to discuss the work plan, including progress on a community out-reach campaign. Board members design and distribute their own posters advertising the services of the Center. But their campaign materials also draw attention to major issues such as how to prevent STIs, HIV/AIDS and unwanted pregnancies.

Narantsatsarralt, a lovely 18 year old with raven hair and an engaging personality, is leader of the Teen Board. “This project has changed my life,” she says without hesitation. “We all face problems, but I have learned how to be more open, communicate with others and help my peers understand important issues, like gender roles and relationships.”
She is recognized in school as a source of information on teen concerns – love, dating, puberty, relations with parents and responsible sexual behavior, among others. “I want to be role model for others in my community,” she explains, “and help improve our lives.”

Bold-Orgil, 14, one of Narantsatsaralt’s fellow Teen Board members, agrees with her views. “I can’t think of anything more important than the work I do here at the Center,” he says. “The health and sexuality issues we deal with are absolutely vital, they shape our outlook, our lives.”

The Center has become much more than a health clinic. It is used by Teen Board members and others as a place they can come to “hang out”, read their favorite publications, including the highly popular quarterly newspaper, “Love”, and share their problems and concerns. For Narantsatsaralt the Center is a home away from home. “I feel comfortable here,” she says. “The doctor is a role model for me. Because of this experience I want to go on to the university and become an adolescent doctor. Before becoming involved in this project, I had no such dreams.”

“It is better to have an education and a job before considering marriage. My parents’ generation married in their early 20s, my grandparents married at 14-16. People should marry later, after you have a profession, or a way to earn money and support yourself.”

- Khishigjargal, 15, member of Teen Board, Tsetserleg, Arkhangai aimag.

The Center in Erdenemandal

A half day’s drive cross-country from Tsetserleg through forest-flanked mountains and across clear, fast-moving streams, is the Future Threshold Adolescent Center in Erdenemandal soum. It too has an active Teen Board and a community out-reach programme. The Center provides the same quality of services as its urban counterparts, servicing larger populations of adolescents.

Most of the clients are 15 to 20 years old and come in for reproductive health services and counseling. Thanks to a vigorous outreach campaign to sensitize local officials, teachers and parents on the need for adolescent friendly health services, community support for the Center is unequivocal.

“The young people who use this Center come mostly for reproductive health and counseling,” says Dr. Densmaa, the Center’s medical doctor. “So far, 60% of our clients are girls and 40% are boys. The girls come mostly for RH services and contraceptives, the boys come mostly for counseling and condoms.”

Seventeen-year-old Delgermaa is the head of the Teen Board in Erdenemandal. Board members meet regularly with teenagers in the community, mostly at school, but also at the Center. Like the group in Tsetserleg, they also produce advocacy material, mainly posters, introducing the Center and its services to the community. At school, she answers questions from girls and boys.

Delgermaa has become a focal point in the community for all questions related to adolescent health and sexuality. It is a role she relishes. “You should live for yourself but help others,” she says. “The message I give to my peers is abstain from sex until you are ready for a relationship, but if you do decide to have sex, plan for it. Be responsible!”

Thanks to the work of doctors and health authorities, and the support of local decision makers, Arkhangai has included the costs of running both Future Threshold Adolescent Centers as part of the province’s annual budget. “Not only do we have a sustainable initiative that is immensely
popular with both adolescents and the community,” remarks Dr. Naranchimeg, “these Centers serve as models for other aimags that want to set up their own adolescent health centers.”

“We have high rates of maternal mortality and teen pregnancies, compared with the rest of the country. We fought for this project because the needs are so great in this province. Now everyone understands the need for adolescent friendly health services.”

- Dr. Dagvasumberel, head of the Health Department in Arkhangai aimag.

5. Health and Sexuality Education in Schools

Offering adolescent friendly health services is only part of the challenge of meeting the development needs of adolescents. Introducing health and sexuality education in secondary schools provides the foundation for good reproductive health. Informed, responsible adolescents turn into knowledgeable, responsible adults.

Building on UNFPA’s work as part of its core programme support for Mongolia, the project was able to accelerate the development of revised curriculum for the Teachers College, part of the State Pedagogical University in Ulaanbaatar. The new curriculum encompassed a wider range of reproductive and sexual health topics. In turn, secondary school teachers, mostly biology instructors, were trained on how to use a new comprehensive health and sexuality education curricula developed with UNFPA assistance and involving the active participation of teachers and adolescents.

This work was carried out under the supervision of the Ministry of Science, Technology, Education and Culture. The Teachers College now requires all students training to be schoolteachers to take a 32-hour, one credit course on health education, which includes topics on reproductive and sexual health. In addition, a 64-hour, two-credit optional course, initiated at the Pedagogical University in 2001 with technical support provided by UNFPA, is available for all students.

At the same time, secondary school teachers have been trained on reproductive and sexual health issues. Before, health education was taught from the biological perspective, with little coverage of important reproductive and sexual health topics, such as puberty, relationships, dating, and relations with parents. As of the end of 2003, 500 secondary school teachers had been trained in health and sexuality education. The goal is to have at least one teacher proficient in these subjects active in each of the country’s 683 secondary schools by the end of 2004. Currently, the bulk of Mongolia’s secondary school students receive at least 90 hours of health education, including 22 hours of sexuality education, per year. Those students who are interested can sign up for more elective hours of reproductive and sexuality education courses.

UNFPA and UNESCO developed a distance-learning program on sexuality issues. A joint publication entitled, “Are You Listening?” was widely distributed. Produced in an accessible, easy to read format, it addresses key questions related to adolescent sexuality and is intended to help parents communicate with their children on a variety of health and sexuality topics. Additionally, UNFPA and UNESCO also designed a Distance Education Programme on Life Skills. This program was launched in the pilot areas. It includes the development of a teacher’s manual, which
will be used to train tutors, and a reader’s book highlighting key issues designed for use by radio and TV broadcasters.

This new approach is nothing short of a revolution in the way health education is addressed in Mongolia. And UNFPA has been at the center of the changes.

“Traditionally, parents do not talk to their children about sexuality. We broke that tradition with distance learning on health and sexuality issues and so should other countries!”
- Ms. Lkhamjav, head of the Education and Culture Department in Arkhangai aimag

5.1 Sexuality education in action

At secondary school number 35, located in the Sukhbaatar district of the capital, 1,878 students are crammed into classrooms built to accommodate half that number. Despite crowded conditions, the atmosphere in Narantogtokh’s classroom is electrifying. As the school’s specialist on health and sexuality education, she is engaged in a lively discussion with her students on the subject of marriage and the family. After her initial presentation the students are divided into discussion groups. Each group is asked to discuss the subject: What kind of family do you want? At the end of the discussions, a consensus is reached for each group.

The results? Most students wanted:
- No more than 2-3 children;
- A family that communicates with each other;
- Careers or jobs for both partners; and
- Shared responsibilities in child rearing and household chores.

Narantogtokh is delighted with the response. “This shows that they have read the course material, understood it and actually thought about the issues raised,” she explains. “I’ve had these kids for four years now and they have all learned a lot in this course.”

Though a number of teachers confessed they were embarrassed at first when trying to talk to their students about sexuality issues, after receiving training and new teaching materials these difficulties were overcome. “My colleagues and I feel very confident now teaching health and sexuality issues,” says Narantogtokh. “No one is embarrassed by the subject matter.”

“Our own attitudes changed while learning how to teach this subject. We are involved in changing people’s basic attitudes as regards sexuality and outlook. These issues are fundamental to modern societies.”
--Ms Oyuntsetseg, methodologist at the National Institute of Education and master trainer on sexuality education, trained by UNFPA

5.2 Adolescent Peer Educators

As a way to further motivate adolescents to change attitudes and behavior, UNFPA has trained members of the Teen Boards of the Future Threshold Centres as peer educators. They now operate in all aimags where the project is active, including the capital. Peer educators play important roles in their schools and local communities as sources of information on a wide variety of teen concerns
related to health and sexuality. Peer educators help reinforce lessons learned in the classroom and direct teens to services.

Two Peer Educators at work

Munkhnaran and her close friend Borgil are both 14. Both are peer educators and both are members of their school’s Student Council and their local Future Threshold Center’s Teen Board. With 2,655 students, their school is one of the largest in Ulaanbaatar. The school is located in a tough neighborhood marked by high unemployment and broken families.

Munkhnaran is a quiet, studious girl, but a fountainhead of knowledge and experience far beyond her 14 years. “I was not sure about becoming a peer educator on health and sexuality issues at first because we have many problems at my school, including smoking, drinking and petty crime,” she points out. “I decided to participate in this project not only to survive at school, but also to make it a better place. I have become very popular because I am a resource for my peers on all these important issues – sexuality, puberty, dating, relationships. As a peer educator I also spend time at the local Future Threshold Adolescent Center, where I give advice to girls and boys.”

Sometimes, Munkhnaran and Borgil talk to street youth in the capital about these issues and distribute information and education materials to them so they will know where to go to get services.

“Many of the older girls in my school are sexually active,” says Munkhnaran. “One girl thought she was pregnant and came to me for advice. I took her to the Center for a pregnancy test and counseling. As it turned out, she was pregnant. After talking to the Center’s counselor, she decided not to have an abortion, but have the baby.”

None of the Future Threshold Centers perform abortions, which are legal in Mongolia. Women or adolescents who want an abortion go to local hospitals or clinics run by the Ministry of Health.

Borgil looks like Munkhnaran’s male counterpart. He is a serious young man with a purpose. “It was Munkhnaran who persuaded me to participate in the project,” he comments. “It’s a decision that has changed my life.”

Borgil routinely fields questions from his peers about a wide range of health and sexuality issues. He even introduced the doctor at the local Future Threshold Center to his school. “I’m in charge of putting up posters around school advertising the services of the Center and also highlighting issues such as how to prevent HIV/AIDS and STIs,” he says.

“One thing this experience has taught me is to prioritize my time and organize activities carefully,” he continues. “Good planning skills are important for your life.”

Both Borgil and Munkhnaran are headed to the university after graduating from high school. Borgil wants to major in international relations, a decision he attributes, in part, to his participation in the project. Munkhnaran wants to go into business.

6. Mass Communication is Key

The most popular teen publication in the entire country is the quarterly newspaper, “Uerkhhellove”. As part of UNFPA’s regular country programme, Love was launched in 1999. It is unique in that the entire publication is planned, designed, written and produced by adolescents with professional support. An advisory board consisting of health and media professionals offers guidance, but Love is run by and for adolescents. Each issue is devoted to one major theme related to health and
sexuality, complemented with fascinating information about pop bands, movie stars, people in the news and other topics of interest to adolescents. Issues covered by Love include: coping with puberty, avoiding STIs, communicating with parents, relationships and dating, sexual orientation, domestic violence, incest and human development and growth.

Currently, 15,000 copies of each quarterly issue are being distributed to every school in the country, as well as UN agencies, government ministries, community groups and NGOs. It is a model for teen publications elsewhere.

Munkhbayar, 16, is a member of the editorial board of Love. There are 12 board members; all but two are girls. Nearly all of them are headed for journalism school after graduation.

Munkhbayar is no exception. “I saw an ad in a daily newspaper here, submitted an essay and was accepted as a staff member,” she says excitedly. “This is a big break for me.” The board meets once a month to discuss upcoming issues, assign stories and research and plan layouts.

She also attended a teen camp during the summer at Yanzaga where she learned a great deal about health and sexuality issues. “The camp was a terrific experience for me,” she says, “because I learned a lot about these issues. I am a better writer as a result.”

Once she goes on to journalism school, Munkhbayar intends to continue writing on these subjects. “I think ‘Love’ is the most important publication in Mongolia for youth,” she says. “I don’t mean this in a self-serving way. But the feedback we get from our peers and from adults just underscores the importance of our work. I really feel I am part of something great; that we are making a real difference in the lives of thousands of adolescents.”

7. Adolescents Speak Out

Youth in Mongolia are becoming more active in their schools and communities. They are more aware of their rights and responsibilities than previous generations. This multifaceted, inter-agency project has propelled progress on a number of fronts:

- Helped remove the cloak of secrecy and shame that surrounded sexual and reproductive health issues;
- Reformed the educational system to include health and sexuality education;
- Provided reproductive health services tailored to the needs of adolescents;
- Sensitized parents and political leaders on the need for adolescent friendly health services;
- Encouraged youth to be more engaged and involved with civic affairs
- Created new partnerships between government, UN agencies, adolescents and civil society.

Perhaps more importantly, the project has given adolescents a new voice and they are being heard.

**On economic and social development:**

“My generation will change the face of this country. I am not going to get pregnant at an early age like my mother. I want to work for a better future for everyone. We will push Mongolia into the modern world.”

Byambasuren, Umnu Gobi

**On sexuality education:**

“Promoting awareness of sexuality issues and life skills with peers is one of the most important things I do at school.”

Bold-Orgil, Tsetserleg
On family life:
“Men and women need to be equal in family life. The burdens should be shared.”
Khishigjargal, Tsetserleg

On environment:
“We could destroy our environment if we keep going as we are, killing animals and destroying habitat. I don’t want to have only photos left of our wildlife for the next generation to look at. I want nature intact.”
Narantsatsarralt, Tsetserleg

On relations with parents:
“Before this project, I didn’t know how to communicate with my parents, now I not only discuss sexuality and health issues with them, I am helping others talk to their parents on these important topics.”
Bulganchimeg, Tsetserleg

On the future:
“Look ahead, not back. We need to think about the future; not take it for granted.”
Bold-Orgil, Tsetserleg

On health and sexuality:
“Adolescents need to know about these issues so they can make informed decisions based on facts, not fiction.”
Delgermaa, Erdenemandal

On sexuality education in schools:
“Some teachers criticized my involvement with this project at first, but once they understood the importance of the issues and how I was working with my peers, they became supporters of sexuality education.”
Borgil, Ulaanbaatar

On peer education:
“At school I talk separately to girls and boys on a wide range of health and sexuality issues. At first they were shy to raise questions, but no longer. We have brought these important issues into the open.”
Munkhnaran, Ulaanbaatar

On studying sexuality subjects at university:
“I am in my first year at the Pedagogical University. I will probably teach entomology. But sexuality education is one of the most important subjects I am studying at the moment. I hope to be able to teach this subject to secondary school students in the future.”
Myagmartuya, Ulaanbaatar

Conclusion

The future may belong to adolescents, but they first have to survive the present. Mongolia is demonstrating that productive partnerships between government, NGOs, adolescents and UN agencies can deliver stunning results in a short period of time. The youth of Mongolia now have a brighter future because of this project.
Part 6: VOICES OF ADOLESCENTS – REVEALING THE TRUE POTENTIAL

In the stories told by adolescents who are serving on the Adolescents Board, the Students Council, the Adolescent Consultative Boards or the Teen Boards, and who have taken part in the many project initiatives, a number of themes emerge, which underline the central role that adolescent participation plays in development, a recognition of which will help stakeholders in designing future interventions and in training participants.

Adolescents recognize and appreciate that the project activities have helped to:

- challenge prejudices and to change attitudes among adults and also among themselves
- strengthen the family unit and increase parent-child communication

They say that the project has generated within them:

- an increased sense of responsibility
- the ability to cooperate and to work in unity
- the desire to share knowledge with others
- an increased confidence in their own capacities
- an ability to make choices based on consciously held values
- a new sense of purpose
- a culture of service

Challenging Prejudices and Changing Attitudes

Young people stated in the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey Report (2000) that they often encounter negative attitudes towards them, from adults who see them as potential trouble-makers. This includes parents, teachers, health professionals and members of the community. Clearly a radical transformation in the attitudes of adults towards adolescents needs to take place before meaningful youth participation can become a reality at grass roots level, and be fully integrated into policy making at national or local level.

In the pilot areas, ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls (and Boys)’ has succeeded in bringing about noticeable changes in the attitudes and behavior of local officials, health professionals, teachers, social workers and parents in the pilot areas. The changes in teachers’ attitudes that have been observed by Davaa, social worker in the rural soum of Alagerdene, are confirmed by students and teachers from schools in other pilot areas.

“Children used to wait for teachers to do something and would never take the initiative. Neither the teachers nor the children knew that they had skills and could organise anything within the school and the community. Teachers took the attitude that children know nothing and that only teachers could be responsible for organizing, because they knew it all. Now because of the training and the various project activities, teachers discuss things with the students and this has made a very big change in the school.”

When adults begin to show respect for adolescents, it is not only the teachers’ attitudes that change. The young people begin to expect more of themselves, and to take responsibility for their own learning, where before they were passive, as fifteen year old Batnyum from Erdenemandal observes:
"We used to be afraid of our teachers because they thought that we would try harder to learn if we were criticised more. Some students even used to hate some teachers. And we students did not think that we needed to learn by ourselves; we just did what the teachers said. We didn’t realise that we ourselves had responsibilities. Now our teachers are much more respectful, and we understand our teachers more and are learning by our own initiative."

Many adolescents have been working in groups to serve their community, from peer educators from Teen Boards and Adolescent Consultative Boards involved in disseminating health and reproductive health information to groups helping drop outs return to school and offering help to kindergartens, single parent households or elderly people. Not infrequently the groups initially encountered lack of trust and the assumption that they would be disruptive and destructive. The following two stories illustrate that when adolescents participate in community activities, negative attitudes towards them begin to change, and that it is possible with persistence and good will, to overcome such barriers, and change the perceptions that people have of adolescents.

“In my class there were many students who couldn’t pass the 8th grade and who dropped out of school. One was a girl whose mother died and our group decided to help her to return to school. We wrote a letter to all the teachers, asking them to take her back into school. The maths teacher was the first teacher who signed our petition and we were very encouraged, and expected all the teachers to sign our letter. But the next teacher was angry with us and said that it was not our right to do something like this. Only the School Director had the right to decide. We were very discouraged and didn’t ask more teachers to sign our letter. But we suggested to her grandfather that he write to the School Director, asking him to accept her back into the school. He agreed and now she is studying with us again”

Munkgerel (17) Erdenmandal, Arkhangai

“We decided to help the local kindergarten but the principal wouldn’t let us in because he suspected we would mess about, break all the rules and disturb the children. We patiently explained that we only wanted to help, so he allowed us in. We divided into 3 groups – making beds, washing up, and helping the children dress and go to the toilet. We taught them songs and rhymes. The Principal would come in to watch us and when we finished, he expressed his gratitude and invited us to return. I really enjoyed working with small children. I felt that I had become a little child again myself. We learned to be courteous to each other in this project, and to make an effort to understand each other”

Munkgerel (17) Erdenmandal, Arkhangai

“Adolescents like the Feeling of Responsibility – we are all trying to learn.”

With rights come responsibilities, and the recognition that they have responsibilities empowers and inspires adolescents. On the threshold of adulthood, they are ready to test their skills as responsible members of society and to exercise their capacities as active agents of change. If they are not encouraged and supported in exploring these capacities and the opportunity to develop is not given, the potential of this most dynamic generation will be lost, and young people will be frustrated and disempowered. The adolescents we talked to recognize the value of having a context in which they can explore and develop these capacities.

Batsaiken (17) from Erdenemandal in Arkhangai began to see the point of participation as he began to appreciate the liberating effect of taking responsibility for his own health. When we deprive a
young person of this feeling by doing everything on their behalf or taking an authoritarian approach and expecting obedience, we are not allowing them to draw on their own innate capacities.

“Until we began this project, we didn’t understand that students have duties. We didn’t realize our responsibilities. Adolescents like the feeling of responsibility – we are all trying to learn. We learned about our health, including reproductive health and I took more responsibility and began to try to change behaviours that were harmful to me. I paid more attention to eating the right foods and I learned ways of protecting myself against disease”

Tsendbayer (14) from the rural soum of Alagerdene, Khuvsgul aimag tells of the pleasure her group experienced by developing a systematic plan to help one of their out of school classmates return to school. When he returns to school, he, in his turn, is encouraged to take the initiative.

"Ganbolor lives with his mother and one day he was carrying a big bag of flour home on a Yak cart, when it turned over. The bag fell on him and damaged him very badly. He could not move his legs. He was ill for a year and we were very worried about him. His mother asked for books and told us that he was always asking about his classmates and his teacher. So our group decided that we could share the duty of helping him with the lessons that he was missing. Each classmate helped him to catch up in a different subject.”

Ganbolor himself takes up the story: " A different classmate every day, came to my home and taught me what they had learned that day. They made it easy for me to catch up. Now I never get less than C or 70 %. I like drawing and since I have returned to school, I have organised an art club for boys. We are organising an exhibition of students’ paintings and drawings. Our motto is "Together, we are strong." We also do service projects, such as preparing and chopping wood. It is good to take responsibility for things"

The Power of Unity - learning to cooperate

Cooperation and unity, and a universal respect for the dignity of each human being are essential before any lasting change can take place within society. Human beings are social beings and their development involves learning how to build positive relationships with others. Many of the adolescents in the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey Report spoke of their need for life skills and values education. Some felt that school was a psychologically damaging environment, in which they were subject to bullying from their peers and authoritarian and discriminatory treatment from their teachers.

Seventeen year old Munktuvshin, a member of the Adolescents Board, is a monk in the Dashchoilin Monastery in Ulaanbaatar. He feels that education should nurture what is best within the human spirit, and that the atmosphere in schools is one of conflict and contention, rather than cooperation.

“I have been studying in Dashchoilin Monastery for 5 years and before that I lived for 2 years with a Buddhist Monk who was my teacher. It is the practice for Buddhist monks who have reached a high level of development to have pupils who live with them and learn. It was my teacher who sent me to the Adolescents Board. It is very interesting to work with others in a group, and very different from my work at the Monastery. At first it was very strange for me, because I was used to spending my time reading books or, when I was at home, helping with the herding, which is very solitary work. I find I enjoy sharing information, ideas and opinions and talking and laughing with my fellow members. I have learned much more about the differences between people and their characters and feelings.
I also notice that the attitudes and behavior of people reflect the difference in their education. In our monastery we are taught to be patient and calm, to avoid anger, and we are taught to learn from our mistakes, and to try to correct them. When I first went into schools, students seemed to me to be unfriendly, always competing against each other and easily roused to aggression. They do not like to acknowledge their mistakes.

Most of the adolescents who took part in the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey drew a picture of their lives as essentially solitary, in spite of living in large families. Much of the time they felt lonely and unable to communicate with those around them. Providing opportunities for young people to explore their capacities in a creative context in the company of their peers should be at the centre of any youth policy. Many of the project participants describe being empowered by working in a group, which has given them a new energy and a new respect for the opinions of others, as well as generating within themselves a new confidence and a sense of identity.

“Though we were studying in the same class we didn’t know each other well. During this project we learned much more about others. Members of the group became very close. What was most important was the way we learned to work together, to help others and to build our own characters in the process”. Solmontsatsral (14), Erdenebulgan, Arkhangai

Oyunchimeg, from Khatgal in Khuvsgul, was one of a number of teachers who noted that with increased participation, there is a greater degree of unity and connection among the students.

“All the teachers noticed that after the project activities the children are more open with each other and their relationship with each other is gentler. They have become able to work as a group, and we are all very happy with these changes. They have also become much more active. Before the students kept themselves very apart from each other and there was very little connection between them. But now it is different.”

Participants describe how their own confidence and that of others has grown by working in a group with a united sense of purpose.

“Before this project, my attitude to participation was not so good. I didn’t care whether I developed or not. I was also very shy, and was much too timid to organize any activities. But now I know that I can. I have begun to have the will to work hard and help my group to succeed. We became more respectful and learned to listen to each other. We have unity.”

Odonchimeg (15) Ik Tamir

“Adolescents who used to be afraid of talking and who would get confused when they talked, learned to express themselves.”

Uranchimeg (13)

Developing human resources

“It is better to be decorated by knowledge than all the finery of the world”. Mongolian proverb

Education is not confined to the school classroom, but is a lifelong process. Being consciously and actively involved in process of learning gives a feeling of self worth, an enhanced sense of identity and helps a person to feel connected. All agencies concentrated on training of not only adolescents but also of health professionals and teachers, of parents and community leaders, of social workers and administrators. Whenever we talked to the participants of a training course, they were full of enthusiasm and excitement at being engaged in the learning process and in developing capacities, which they were not aware that they possessed.
Narantsetseg, from Erdenemandal soum, Arkhangai is a single mother with 5 children.

“I have really enjoyed this learning process. We need more education. Many people, especially young people are without jobs and they waste their time. It would be very good if more training could be organised in the future, because there are many who would enjoy studying. When we learn, we are more able to explore possibilities of helping each other and making a difference in our community”

Ulzii, an unemployed mother of two children, was very happy for her ger to become the focus for many gatherings of the families participating in the Sexuality Education course, in between the weekly meetings. She keeps a neat register, with birthdates of all the members of her group, looks after the study materials for the neighbouring families, and collects relevant pamphlets and articles out of newspapers to share with other families. They share their insights from the textbooks and listen to the radio lesson together, during which they make and share notes.

“I really like to learn and would love to be involved in more training, and learn how to teach others. I want to take every opportunity I can to learn. We have become much more confident through studying and have learned to trust and believe in others. I want such training to be organised again and again. What we are studying is very important for life, and I have begun to pay much more attention to my children. I really loved my children, but now I love them more. Sometimes we send our books to other families in the rural areas who pass them from one family to the other. We didn’t know each other at all before, but now all the participating families know each other very well. We have also shared our knowledge and experience of other skills we may have, to young families”

Such capabilities, having been released at the grass roots level, should be nurtured and supported. The strengthening of the family unit and of the local community is the foundation of the development of the whole country and government support of capacity building at grass roots level is essential to maximize the transformation that has begun to take place.

“Many migrant families are interested in being involved in this project. Most families have very little access to information and are especially delighted to get books from us. Facilitators were sent from Ulaanbaatar, who conducted workshops, using participatory methods and the parents were really interested. After the workshop people would stop me in the street and ask when the trainers were coming again to conduct more workshops.”

One of Mongolia’s strengths among the developing countries is that it has a literate population. In 1990 there was 98% literacy and even with the deterioration of education services after transition and the growing number of children who are kept out of school, the literacy rate is still higher than in many western countries. However books are expensive, and many rural families have no books in their home, while, in school, text books are in short supply and often need to be shared between a number of students. In most of the target families that we talked to, books are highly valued commodities.

All agencies have considered it of the utmost importance that the quality of textbooks and IEC materials is as high as possible. These range from pocket-sized pamphlets and posters on sexuality education, to illustrated textbooks on adolescents health and development issues. All are colourful and well designed, with attractive illustrations, and a high standard of printing and binding, and designed with adolescents in mind. One agency brought in a special consultant to involve adolescents in the development of appropriate material. Many young people and adults spoke of their pleasure and pride in having a book and materials, which is theirs to keep. They share them eagerly with neighbouring families, classmates and friends. In formal school their experience is
often that teachers will not allow them to use a book unless they pay for it and do not trust them to take books home. Facilitators received many requests to allow the participants to share the textbooks with others - cousins who were getting married, or a sister with adolescent children.

In Ik Tamir, a small rural soum in Arkhangai, with a population of 5,000, the participants of the course have arranged a mini library system in the learning centre whereby copies of the textbooks each have a card so that other people in the soum can borrow them for a few days.

“We have all been very happy to have the course books. We have no other books in our homes and we would like more, or at least have access to others”.

“We have learned ourselves through teaching” - peer education

One truth that has been very clearly demonstrated during the implementation of the initiatives of all agencies in the adolescents’ project has been the value of peer education. Participants report feeling empowered by realizing that they can be agents for the development of others. It is a strong motivation to learn. Not only the adolescents, but also health professionals, teachers and community leaders have come to understand that there is a dynamic in peer education which makes it a powerful tool in development. It is also evident that teaching is one of the most effective ways to learn.

"It is better when young people teach young people."

"Kids Can Teach Kids" This has proven to be particularly effective in health education. Most adolescents believe that they are healthy and are unlikely to spend very much time thinking about what is conducive or inimical to staying healthy unless they are encouraged to do so. Peer education and imaginative approaches to the provision of health information and health care, including reproductive health, are ways of engaging the attention of adolescents and encouraging them to take responsibility for their own health.

"In the past we were taught by parents and other adults that we should not drink or smoke, and that we should know about how to prevent HIV/AIDS, but during the project this changed. We learned about it ourselves and then we taught it to others. It is better when young people teach young people. When we make suggestions and our suggestions are taken up and acted on, we are very happy and as a result, we will pay more attention to what is going on around us and make many more suggestions." (Bukhdelger (14) Khotont soum)

“We taught students from the 5th grade about HIV/AIDS and other illnesses and in order to do this we had to know a lot about it ourselves. After the training we gave questionnaires asking how they had liked the training and they said they had learned a lot and were very grateful. We discover that we have learned ourselves through teaching.” Munkzuul

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Odenchimeg (15), describes how a group of 13 friends set up a healthy living campaign

“One major problem that adolescents have is smoking and drinking, and we saw that many of our classmates drink and smoke. We organised a campaign against drinking and smoking. We wrote and performed a play about it, to which we invited 62 adults who had been arrested for drinking, and also doctors and policemen. We invited one man who had been arrested for drunkenness to talk to us. He told us that he was ashamed to stand in front of us because we had organised the play against drinking and smoking. We also organised a poster competition against alcohol among many different groups of children from many different schools and including disabled children. The most significant thing is that before this project we did not know how to organise activities and programmes, and it helped us to a new understanding of how we could become active in the life of society and how to activate and motivate our friends and other students who are not so active.
Peer encouragement and support brings out of school adolescents back to school

One of the objectives of ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents’ was to increase school attendance. We were told of a number of drop outs who had returned to school as a result of initiatives taken by their peers or former classmates. Two things were clear from the stories of each of the out of school adolescents we talked to. The first was that each had a strong desire to study, which had been frustrated by external circumstances, usually beyond their control. The second was that the interest and support of their peers was the catalyst to encourage them to return to school. They spoke with appreciation of the encouragement they had received, and the new direction that their lives had taken as a consequence. The following two stories illustrate two different approaches from adolescent groups.

Buyandalai, who lives in the lakeside soum of Khatgal in Khuvsgul, has returned to school after having dropped out for three years, as a result of the actions of a group of her former classmates, who visited her as part of their ‘Service’ activities. They told her how the atmosphere at school had changed because of the project, and persuaded her to return to school, promising to help her with her studies. Munkchuulun, the school social worker, has asked the teachers to give her special attention, and her classmates are doing their best to help her.

“Life was very difficult and my parents were very poor and I only had very old and ragged clothes to go to school in. I was very shy and embarrassed and so I left school and stayed at home for 3 years. But during last year my former classmates came to visit me and encouraged me to come back to school. They gave me clothes and school supplies. I now live in the school dormitory. I think that the number of clubs and activities has increased because young people are more interested when they are organizing things for each other. Before this project, we thought only adults had a right to speak. Now we understand that adolescents and children have a right to express their own opinions and give their own suggestions, and to teach others. Kids can teach kids.”

(Photo – circle by the river)

Fourteen year old, Khuslenjarghal, who had been out of school for four years, found new opportunities because of a group of 9th grade girls in School No. 50 in Ulaanbaatar. The group was given her name by the District Governor’s office. Khuslenjarghal tells her story...

“My sisters and brothers and I came to Ulaanbaatar from Gobi Altai four years ago with my mother, who had cancer and needed to go into hospital. I had no registration and so I did not go to school for four years. Now my mother is better, but she does not have work and nor do my older brothers and sisters. We are six living together in our ger. One day the District Governor’s office called me to come and meet a group of girls from School No 50. They talked to me and spent some time helping me with mathematics. I liked studying with them very much. They suggested that I join the sewing class at the NFE centre at School No 50, and I went along and joined the class. After four months I graduated, and now I am going to stay in the Centre and become a teacher of sewing. One day my mother came to visit my teacher, and now she also comes to the classes. We work together. We are not paid, but we like to be there. If kindergartens or other institutions order clothes, we get paid for making them. Since that first week, I have not seen those girls again. Though our centre is in the school, it is not really part of it. I don’t have any friends in the school, but I am very grateful to the group for suggesting I came here.”

Although this story has a happy ending, it highlights the fragmentation that is so often the norm, especially in an urban context. Whereas in Buyundalai’s case there is sustained attention given to her by her classmates, the teachers and the social worker, the group who brought Khuslenjarghal to the NFE centre have not made an effort to continue their relationship with her, or to build on the
enthusiasm she had when they helped her study mathematics. Apart from her sewing teacher, she has little contact with teachers and has no friends in School No 50. The NFE sewing room, where Khuslenjarghal is so happy now to be spending her days, is to be found behind a small door off the main school corridor. It is like entering another world. While the rest of School No 50 is spacious and attractively decorated, in contrast, the sewing room is at the end of a long, dark and unheated passage, which was being used for storing janitorial equipment, and was unclean and in a state of disrepair. The room itself was bleak and basic, though there were attractive hand drawn instructions for traditional Mongolian embroidery on some of the walls. She has not been encouraged to return to formal education, or to take part in the adolescent project activities that have been so successful in increasing participation in the school itself. The group who contacted Khuslenjarghal would have gained so much more from the experience and participated much more in their own development had they been encouraged to continue their relationship with her, and integrate her into their own activities. (Photo – Kuslenlarghal and her mother sewing)

Empowering boys to participate

One of the unique features of Mongolia is that, unlike in many other Asian countries, girls have equal opportunities in terms of education and there are more girls than boys in both secondary and tertiary education. Although school enrollment in the first grade is equal for boys and girls, by the 8th grade the girls far outnumber the boys, and by the 10th grade the proportion of girls is 62.0% to 38.0% of boys. In higher education the difference is even more dramatic with 71.0% of diploma students and 65.0% of degree students being girls. Another significant factor is that with a high percentage of secondary school teachers and 92.0% of primary school teachers being women, boys have few male role models within their school.

The activities within ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls (and Boys)’ seem to be having a positive effect in increasing the health-seeking behaviour of boys. Future Threshold Centres record an average of between 500-1000 adolescent clients per month, of which more than one third (35%) are boys. In addition, both parents and young people testify to the positive effect that IEC materials on sexuality and reproductive health have on their confidence and self esteem.

“My boy used to be very shy and afraid with girls and sat silent in their company, until he read the materials. The information he gained gave him confidence. Now he is much more self assured and comfortable making friends with girls and introducing his classmates to them.”

Altantuya, Murun, Khuvsgul

School attendance among boys has also improved. A number of adolescents commented that boys who habitually played truant, have been more enthusiastic about attending school since they have been working in a supportive group and have begun to be empowered by taking responsibility.

“The boys of our class were not very active and they often played truant, but now that our class has been involved in the project, they are more active and attend lessons. We have begun to use our sports facilities and other rooms much more freely. We discuss ideas and everyone tries to help by adding new ideas”. Odonchimeg (15)

“During this project the boys became more active and started to attend lessons, whereas before we didn’t go, and didn’t understand the point of social activities” Batsaiken (17)

Munkbaatar (15) from Erdenemandal recognizes how his own attitude and behaviour has changed since he has been a member of the Student Council and has been participating in the project.
“Neither I, nor any of the other boys were active in class or close to the teachers. We always learned very badly. But when I was elected to the Student Council I became concerned about my classmates and I went to our teachers and asked if they could spend some time reviewing the lessons for us. I also asked if I could organise clubs and special classes for students who liked to be involved in the arts. The teachers took up my suggestion and organised classes for those who did not learn so well and also advanced classes for others who did. I had never bothered about such things before. Boys don’t usually. I liked the feeling of taking responsibility for something.”

Although there are still fewer boys than girls on the Teen Boards for the Future Threshold Centres and the Adolescent Consultative Boards for the Adolescent Health Cabinets, the number of boys becoming actively involved is increasing. Many of the boys describe a radical change in their attitude towards girls, whom they have learned to respect. Several boys who are members of these advisory boards described how they give health advice to their peers, both boys and girls. They had noticed that whereas girls will take health and reproductive health related literature and read it there and then, boys will put it away and read it later in private. Their apparent reluctance is only embarrassment, and they are just as interested as the girls are.

“What is really important is to make sure that adolescents have the right information. They do not need to know everything but the information they are given should be correct”.

(Boy’s name ?): Member of Teen Board of the Future Threshold Centre, Murun

There is evidence that boys respond to a systematic and organized but informal process of learning and action, which encourages group responsibility and a shared function of leadership. While adolescent boys may be less likely to take individual initiative than girls of the same age, it seems that they are empowered by the opportunity to participate in group activities.

It is worth noting that, in spite of the high proportion of educated girls, those holding the most senior positions in Mongolia are still predominantly men. In education, while 98% of primary school and 70% of all secondary school teachers are women, 88% of School Directors are men.

**Nurturing a Culture of Service**

Many of the adolescents actively involved in the project reported a new optimism and sense of purpose as a result of their conscious participation in activities aimed at improving the lives of their fellow human beings. They have learned to recognize the essential dignity of every human being, and to respect their rights. Their outlook has expanded and they have begun to develop a clearer perspective, by seeing things from the standpoint of others, and by learning to appreciate and respect the differences between people, while recognizing that all are part of one human family. They have developed a sense of connectedness.

“Our group decided that one of our service activities would be to make friends with Telmen, who was 13, but had never been able to go to school because he cannot speak and has something wrong with his limbs. No one has taught him how to read and write. He became a member of our class group. When we were teaching the kindergarten children songs and rhymes and we taught him also – he participated in all the games. He doesn’t go to school because he cannot speak but he should go to a special school. I think he could learn if he was in a proper environment. We have discovered that people who do not understand people who are different, would be changed if they make friends with them. We were encouraged and inspired because we had been able to help him and Telmen also enjoyed it because he met many students and made many friends. We realised that if we can help one person, we can help others.”

Munkzuul and Badamlingua, (15) Ulaanbaatar
“Before we worked with drop-outs we used to laugh at them and didn’t understand their situation. But when our group began to teach them to read and write I began to understand. One 11 year old boy we taught was so inspired that he asked his parents if he could go to Ulaanbaatar and start school from the first grade and they let him go with his older sister. We were very happy - we had made a difference” Delgermaa (16) Erdenemandal

Every human being has the potential to think and act creatively. All too often the education process, rather than nurturing creativity, discourages originality and individual initiative. Adolescents involved in the project have begun to discover the liberating effect of creative thinking, especially in relation to the development of their community.

Many described moments when they noticed themselves thinking in a new way:

“Before this project all we did was to go to school and then go back home and do our homework. We did not know what to do with our time. Now we have learned to spend it usefully. My attitude has changed. One of our activities involved planting flowers in a kindergarten. Later I saw a flower in my room and thought I’d take a cutting and root it and plant it at school. I realized that I had learned how to be thoughtful and creative in relation to others and my surroundings. Even if you do something very small, it makes a difference.” Badamlingua (14)

“Before this project we would not have offered to help anyone, because we didn’t know what their reaction would be. Now we realize everyone needs support and to feel connected. We have got rid of our fear”. Orghantuya (15)

“One day in winter I and my classmates saw one of the meteorologists from the Weather Forecasting Station slip on the ice. We laughed at him, but I thought that we shouldn’t be laughing at him. He had to come and check the instruments every three hours and the conditions of the road around his station were very icy and dangerous in winter. So, I suggested that we could help him by clearing the ice, and we went to the Station Director and asked permission. He said he had not thought that teenagers could be so helpful and thoughtful. He and the meteorologists were very grateful and showed us all their observation instruments. We learned a lot from them.” Delgermaa (16) Erdenemandal, Arkhangai

Ariunchimeg’s group learned that individual progress is very much affected by the degree of encouragement and support that are received from others. In spite of initial challenges, they persisted in helping a young girl, whose low grades kept her in the same class for two years.

"One of the activities our group chose was to help junior classes to learn better, and we saw that Narangerel was much bigger than the other children in her class and decided to help her. She was very bad tempered and always quarreled with the teacher and was very aggressive towards us. But we decided to persist in working with her, and after some time she became much less aggressive and made a big effort to do the lessons. In the summer she passed her exam. During the holidays she came to my house and told me how grateful she was for our help. She said she had been embarrassed in the presence of other students because she was the only one who had not passed her exams. She said "I wanted to change my face for another face, so no one would recognize me." She had been living under stress and felt very isolated, and that is why she had behaved badly. Now she felt differently about herself, and her behaviour had changed and so had her grades.” Ariunchimeg (16)
Strengthening the Family Unit

The family is the basic institution at the heart of the community. A united and loving family, in which the rights of each individual member are respected and upheld, and in which each fulfills his or her responsibilities, is a source of strength and creativity. At its best it is a nurturing environment, where the individual learns to face the challenges of life with confidence, and acquires the positive values and principles, which will characterize his or her relationship with others and with society. However, the family can also be an environment which generates negative attitudes, and the suppression of all feeling; where domination, injustice and violence are accepted as the norm; a breeding ground for prejudice and fear. The habits and attitudes, formed within the context of the family, can become a positive force for social transformation, or obstacles to social progress. Among the most disturbing factors to be observed throughout the world during the last few decades has been the weakening of family bonds and the disintegration of the family structure.

One of Mongolia’s strengths is that there are large extended families, which traditionally provide a strong network of support for individual members of the family. Yet adolescents often do not feel supported by their parents. The MANAS Report (2000) describes an expectation that children should shoulder a large part of the chores, and that they should be passive and silent in the presence of adults. There is often very little intimate and personal communication between parents and children, and they are not trusted to spend time away from the home environment with their friends.

For this reason several of the initiatives of the adolescents project focused not only on the individual adolescent, but on the family, and were designed to open channels of communication between parents and their teenage children, thereby tackling the roots of a problem which has profound implications for society. The responses of adolescents, parents, facilitators and members of the community, indicate that the project has provided a clear context in which parents and their adolescent children can learn together, work together and consult about matters that affect their lives. Both adults and adolescents have discovered unexpected capacities in building relationships.

“I used not to have a close relationship with my parents, especially my father. My parents never seemed to talk much to each other, or when they did, they would be angry with each other or with us. But my father participated in Sexuality Education and he helped me to study this book. I learned many important things about myself and our relationship became much closer. The whole atmosphere in our family changed. My parents began to talk and laugh with each other in front of us and I am very happy with this. The members of our family began to understand each other, including my sister and brother.” Uranchimeg (13)

Within the project adolescents have discovered that they have rights and responsibilities, and their parents have begun to re-examine their attitudes and the way they behave towards their children.

“We didn’t know anything about child rights until we began this project. Now I understand that it is my right and also my responsibility to study. I share what I learn with my parents, and their attitude towards me is changing. Before, my parents would immediately punish us if they thought we were doing anything wrong. Now, before deciding whether or not to punish us, they talk to us and try to understand why we are doing whatever it is that they did not like.” Myagmarsuren (14) Erdenebulgan, Arkhangai

Adolescents are discovering the capacity to contribute to the development of both their own family and the community in creative ways. In several soums adolescent learners brought their families

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4 Building Moral Capabilities, Arbab, Corea, & Anelo  FUNDAEC
together to roleplay some of the problems that they encounter within the families. Family members were delighted and intend to use more such techniques to explore aspects of their lives.

A young member of the Teen Board of the Future Threshold Centre in Murun, Khuvsgul recognizes that stability within families depends on the capacity to build relationships.

“The way adolescents learn to relate to other people when they are young will be how they relate to people when they are older. If they learn from a young age how to build relationships, especially between boys and girls and learn to communicate with each other, they will face far fewer obstacles or hindrances to communication when they are older. The result will be far more stability within families” (Name of Girl)

Batamgalan’s adolescent daughters gave her active and systematic support to enable her to study in the Sexuality Education course with the other families.

“After each lesson they tried to help me with my homework and also tried to help more with the housework so that I would have much more free time to do my lessons. It felt very good to be so busy. My sister also asked if she could come with me. I found it very peculiar to talk about sexuality the first time. This is not the Mongolian way and we had never talked about these things. But after several lessons I realized that it was necessary and now I share all my knowledge with my children. We have become a strong family unit”

Becoming Connected - “We are no longer invisible”

Many of the adolescents and also their parents who participated in the project describe their feelings of having been released from confinement. Their lives are hard and they often felt constrained, oppressed, disconnected and ignored. However, they have experienced a new liberty through their participation, as they learn to use the capacities that are within them. They are able to take the initiative to change their own lives, and contribute towards changing the lives of others.

Thirteen year old Ankbayar was out of school because his family migrated to Ulaanbaatar and he was refused at school because he had no registration papers. Ankbayar has been studying the distance education courses within the project and was elected leader of his group. During a Family Day celebration, Ankbayar demonstrated his skills as a facilitator, using participatory methods with the audience as learners. His lively peer education techniques, and the activities he set up, had every member of the audience eager to participate. When he asked a question, a forest of hands went up with cries of “Bi, Bi, Bi”, (“Me, me, me”), all trying to attract his attention. Yet in his formal school, before the family migrated, he was not one of the members of the class whom teachers encouraged or called on to answer questions. There were no expectations that he would be an achiever. Like many students from lower income families, he had been largely ignored by teachers, who are usually concerned with maintaining the academic achievement level in the school. As a result, he did not expect very much of himself. Now he feels connected and acknowledged.

“We were invisible before. But not any longer. Now we can be seen!”

Enkbat, a 49 year old grandmother of 6 and mother of 7, makes the same point in a different way.

“Life is very hard and sometimes I sell in the market. Being without a job means that we just stay at home and no-one pays any attention to us. We are not important to anyone. But when we go to the sexuality education course we learn many things and gain new information. We have more to talk about with others. I have become much more open and I speak about these issues with my
children. When I visit the countryside I share my new knowledge with my friends, and show them the book and my class notes. In rural areas many families have young girls and boys who are getting married, and we gave them our text books to help them understand and prepare themselves. Now I realise that I don’t have to just stay at home. I can learn and help others to learn.”

**The Moral Compass - the capacity to make moral choices.**

Education should be a process of creating the capacity to develop the vast potential, which lies within individual human beings, and the inherent awareness of moral values, so that they may become effective agents of change. Within the school curriculum, as in many other countries, there is little or no concern to develop moral capabilities, which, it is assumed, should be addressed within the context of the family. The MANAS Report (2000) reveals that many adolescents feel that they do not have a sense of purpose to direct them and have not been given guidance for their behaviour, which would enable them to counteract the negative influences they are encountering in the media. They feel that violence, crime and promiscuity in the media are having a very negative influence on their own attitudes and practices and they even suggested there should be censorship of such material. According to 44.2% of girls and 41.9% of boys, the information they most needed was life skills, and they stressed that everyone should have good moral principles and ‘good manners’. Yet, when asked what most influenced their own status in society, only 5% said ‘morals’.

Values are an aspect of most of the training, which has taken place in the project, whether training health professionals in adolescent friendly health standards, or Teen Boards of Future Threshold Centres to be peer educators. The Child Rights and the Life Skills distance learning programmes directly address the adolescents’ need for guidance in defining the values, which will underpin the choices and decisions they will make throughout their lives. The training manual for facilitators and child leaders provides the key in a section devoted to values transformation and team building.

> “Actions are often dictated by intentions and intentions are often based on values, or on what one considers important in life. Values set the perspective on holistic development. They are translated and seen through action. They guide you in making decisions. Values are standards that you use to express, evaluate, and recognize behavior as right or wrong, just or unjust and appropriate or inappropriate”

Sarantuya from Erdenemandal is well aware of the responsibilities of parenthood, and the care that is needed to ensure that her 4 children develop the capacity to make informed moral choices, and to fulfill their potential as future parents and citizens.

> “Now that my children are adolescents, I am very happy to be learning how to prepare them for the changes in their lives, and how to speak with them in a way that they can understand. Before this project, when our children were watching TV we didn’t know how to discuss the moral implications of what they were watching. I am also concerned by all the negative information that is usually found in the newspapers.”

> “We all want to know how to behave. We need to learn not to raise our voices with our children, to bring our children up with dignity, and to know how fathers should behave. We know that children are very different from each other – that each child is unique. We both believe that, since our children are the parents of the future, it is essential that they should have proper moral guidance”
Most of the adolescents we talked to said they experience discourtesy and abuse on a daily basis from peers and adults, and stressed the importance of teaching the qualities of respect for others and courtesy, as well as the need to be patient, loving, helpful and forgiving. Above all they spoke of the need for truthfulness and honesty, as the virtues, which provide the foundation for successful relationships within the family or the community. They believe this is no less true at the level of government, civil society and corporate affairs than it is at an individual level.

“When people are honest then things will function in society. It does not work if you tell lies when it is convenient or you don’t like or know the person.”    Munktsetseg (16)

“When there is honesty things will not work properly”    Tsendbayar (14).

“Optimism is very important. I wish people would think more positively. One needs to have a very clear goal, and put all ones efforts into fulfilling that goal”    Ochirhand (15)

The adolescents insist that it is important that they are taught to distinguish between right and wrong, and that they learn how to resist negative influences from their peers and elsewhere.

Dealing with Bullying

The need for such values training is very evident in the case of bullying, which is experienced by a very high proportion of adolescents, from mocking and name calling to being forced to do something that they don’t want to do, including taking harmful substances and sexual activity.

The Centre against Violence revealed that 38% of teachers hit children to discipline them. More than a third of both urban and rural adolescents surveyed in MANAS (2000), said that bullying was their biggest problem, and one of the two major factors influencing their access to education. Many of the adolescents we interviewed spoke of the daily bullying that goes on in their schools and communities, and also within the family, which sometimes includes sexual abuse.

Although they disliked and feared it, they had not automatically assumed that it was wrong for those who were strong to exercise power over those who were weaker, until they had learned about their rights through the project.

“Now I know bullying is a violation of rights. These things need to be taught. Our parents need to teach us these things. Before I didn’t know when something was right or not. Now we know much better and can see how important it is to teach others to behave in a way that is more responsible”.    Tumenod (13)

“In this project I have learned how to stand up for my self and to make my own judgements about what is right or wrong. If I meet an aggressive person or someone who wants to persuade me to do something that I don’t want to do or which would have a bad effect on my behaviour, I can resist their influence.”    Tortotakh (16)

Many project participants emphasized that knowledge of their rights had given them an understanding of the negative forces behind bullying and the courage to stand up to bullies. Now they respond to victimization by telling the bully that they are violating the rights of others by such behaviour, and that they have rights of their own and responsibilities to respect the rights of others. In some cases, they have found that the bullying has gradually stopped, though the initial response is always “Mind your own business!” Others have not managed to stop the bullying, but they feel
differently about themselves. They no longer feel ashamed of being victims, and are more ready to
tell their teachers or other adults what they are suffering.

Enkbat, at 16, is one of the tallest in his class at the school at Burrentogtoh, a rural soum with 1,100
families, most of which have lost their herds in two successive Dzud. Enkbat confesses that he used
to bully the younger children.

“I didn’t know that it was bullying. I thought it was just behaving like a strong man. Now I
understand, and I relate to them in a different way. They respect me more now because I am
not trying to bully them. Now I am trying to teach my peers how to respect each other and to
be good friends. It is much more fun”.

During our visit to Enkbat’s ‘Child Rights’ meeting, we watched them preparing a drama, to present
in their formal school classes, in which Enkbat played an aggressive bully – a performance much
enjoyed by his peers, especially his hapless victims in the drama. Enkbat’s sister Galod was in the
audience...

“I used to have a big problem with Enkbat, who used to bully me all the time. But now he
treats me with courtesy. Together we are training others to resist psychological pressure
from those who force others to do things they don’t want to do, such as smoke and drink or
give them things they ask for. Now people in school don’t call each other names so often”.

Project participants also have been taking the initiative to share their new understanding with
neighbouring families, in some of which adults are in the habit of beating their children. Their
experience is often that after a period of studying the material together, the beating stops. They
believe that it is because the members of the family come to understand that there are alternative
ways to behave, and that they have a choice.

In Arbulag soum in Khuvsgul, a small local survey revealed the extent to which violence and abuse
takes place both the family and the school.

“We conducted another survey, after the project, which showed that the situation was
getting much better. We saw a great difference in the approach of the children who had
taken part in the project initiatives. They are having a very good influence on the other
children.”  O Erdenbat, School Director,

Transforming the Community

While it is clear that the project is having a considerable effect wherever it is taking place, it is in
the rural soums, where far-reaching effects are most visible. It was remarkable how many of the
soum governors were very well informed of the details of the project, are taking an active part in its
implementation, and who told us personal stories of lives which have changed within their
community as a result of the project. J. Purevjav, Governor of Arbulag, (pop. 4,500) shows how his
office is prepared to support adolescent initiatives in concrete ways.

“We pay a great deal of attention to this project and work hard because it is very important
for the future generations. We would like to set an example for other soums and aimags.
Every soum has a Coordination Committee, headed by the Governor, which plans activities.
We are following a fast track for advocacy of the adolescents project. We called a meeting
of the local government staff and all the bagh governors to explain the project, at which we
showed them a role-play performance by the adolescents. We also provided a micro-bus to take adolescents to perform a presentation concert for families in remote baghs, where the governors, in particular, were very interested. Inspired by the project we are disseminating information about health, reproductive health, child rights, human rights and other legal issues. As a result, local NGOs are planning similar activities and have set up a bulletin board. Many health service workers were invited to participate in a training course in child participation, which the facilitator conducted at local level, after the training in Ulaanbaatar.

“We regularly talk about the implementation of the project, and discuss the many changes that are taking place in the children’s lives and in the school environment. One of the most important changes is the increased parent-child communication. Mongolians are used to having very cold relationships within their families. It has provided opportunities for teachers and parents to work together and for the first time parents and teachers are communicating well. In our soum the mothers are very active and we have held two meetings with all the mothers. Next time we’ll invite all the fathers.”

“We are also trying to reach out of school adolescents, and encourage those in formal school to bring about a transformation of the school. We have learned during this project that peer education is a most effective way to bring about change.”

The integrated approach and the cooperation between those involved in interventions by all four UN agencies is very much appreciated in this small soum, where it is very apparent that a holistic approach to development really works. The local government has also organised skills training for income generation among the target families. Working in a group in the Sexuality Education course helped Nyamsuren, a very good needlewoman, to realize that she could share this skill with others. The local Labour Office gave her a loan and she now conducts training for other parents. In the Adolescents Development Centre, a colourful display of hand crafts was proof of the learners’ skill in dressmaking, embroidery, felt making, knitting and crochet work.

This level of cooperation between the local authority, health professionals, school administration, social worker, teachers and non formal educationalists is a key factor in the success of ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls (and Boys)’ in bringing about radical change in the pilot communities. This positive experience, mirrored in many of the rural soums, is not always the case in urban areas, however, where there is less willingness to collaborate and share resources.

It is essential that such capabilities, having been released at the grass roots level, should be nurtured and supported, not only by local government but also at national level. The strengthening of the family unit and of the local community is the foundation of the development of the whole country. Government support of community development and participation at grass roots level is needed to maximize the transformation that has begun to take place.

“Young people are a source of creativity, energy and initiative, of dynamism and social renewal. They learn quickly and adapt readily. Given the chance to go to school and find work, they will contribute hugely to economic development and social progress. When we fail to give them these opportunities, at best we would be complicit in an unforgivable waste of human potential. At worst, we would be contributing to all the evils of youth without hope: loss of morale, and lives that are socially unproductive and potentially destructive – of the individuals themselves, their communities and even fragile democracies.”

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan
‘We the Peoples’
Part 7: A GENERATION OF HOPE – facing the challenges

The adolescent years are characterized by a spirit of adventure, by vigour, alertness, eagerness and optimism. They are years when young people are testing their independence, shouldering new responsibilities and searching for identity and purpose. When they are able to live and learn in an environment that is safe and supporting, they become a dynamic force for change. The much-desired transformation in the functioning of our global society, will depend to a great extent on the preparations that young people are able to make for the world which they will inherit.

Participation is not something bestowed by an enlightened government or an institution. It is the basic right of every individual. It is the responsibility of government and civil society to establish a channel by which the adolescent voices can be heard, and to provide a context in which adolescents can learn the skills they will need to be effective participants in the development of the society to which they belong.

In the context of ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls (and Boys)’, the evidence of the preliminary findings of an overall project evaluation currently being conducted, is that each of the linked programmes, conducted by the various implementing agencies, have been effective in increasing adolescent participation in the context of family, school and the community. Young people’s participation has already effected many positive changes in all three arenas, which is an indication of the great potential for transformation that lies in increased adolescent participation at all levels of society. At the level of national policy, the Ministry of Health has approved the Adolescent Friendly Health Service Standard and the ‘My Passport’ Participation Campaign has been introduced into 600 schools throughout Mongolia, at the decree of the Prime Minister, under the leadership of the National Board for Children, involving 63,000 adolescents in 2 years.

Scientific studies have shown that the greatest force for protection against unhealthy, risk taking behaviour, is the closeness and connection which adolescents feel to their family, their teachers and fellow students, and their community. Although Mongolia does not yet have the enormous challenge facing its neighbouring countries, of the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS, and drug abuse, it is imperative that timely steps are taken to prevent the spread of such destructive factors. Alcoholism and prostitution are increasing year by year among Mongolian adolescents, as are depression, accident and suicide. The initiatives that have been taken within the Adolescents Project have underlined the fact that young people feel more connected in proportion to the degree in which they are able to participate. Participation is both a protective factor against the risks that face adolescents, and a positive factor in the realization of the full potential of this most dynamic segment of society.

However, adolescent participation will not be fully understood overnight. All but the youngest of Mongolian adults grew up in a society where they were the recipients rather than the participants in the shaping of policies, which affected their daily life. In 1990 the power of the state abruptly gave way to the power of market forces, and individual responsibility suddenly came into focus. But there was little expertise in the process of empowerment and little attention has so far been paid to building capacities of young people to become active participants in development, and to become future leaders. Although many adults, who are working with young people, are very open to new ideas, there is a natural tendency to interpret those ideas in the light of their own experience, which can result in keeping adolescent participation at the level of manipulation, decoration or tokenism - the levels of non-participation identified by Roger Hart in his Ladder of Participation. Often the demands of bureaucracy force professional adults into deadlines, which are impossible to meet, if adequate time is given to meaningful consultation with adolescents. Unconscious attitudes of superiority militate against the full participation of adolescents in the decision making process.
Within ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls (and Boys)’ a beginning has been made to create a context and a climate in which an understanding of the nature of real participation can grow.

- Structures such as the Adolescents Board, Students Councils, Adolescents Consultative Boards and Teen Boards have been set up which act as a channel for adolescent voices and which can serve as models for policy makers.
- The new Education Law declares the right of each student to present requests, proposals, criticisms and demands with regard to his/her educational institutions and teaching staff. A democratically elected Student Council in every school would be a channel for student participation in policy and decision-making.
- The Ministry of Health has approved the adoption of the Adolescent Friendly Health Services standard for all health services in the pilot areas, and Adolescent Health Cabinets have been re-vitalised.
- High quality adolescent friendly health and reproductive health education material has been distributed widely to thousands of adolescents.
- ‘Future Threshold Centres’ have been established in 8 of the pilot sites, to provide health information, counseling, diagnosis and treatment to adolescents.
- The ‘My Passport’ Campaign has been accepted by the Mongolian Government as a valuable framework to encourage groups of adolescents to participate and to initiate activities, and has been introduced into secondary schools in 21 aimags, under the direct guidance of the National Board for Children.
- Hundreds of new youth clubs have been established in the pilot areas
- A number of Manuals which provide guidelines for adolescent participation, have been written, which provide a foundation for training of adolescents in the principles and practice of participation, as well as local government officials, teachers, social workers, and parents.

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The results of ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents’ have shown that participation increases self-esteem and confidence, and generates sense of responsibility and purpose among adolescents. The project has helped to develop leadership and organizational skills among the adolescents in the pilot schools, and an understanding of the concept of service, and of unity in diversity. In order that these achievements are not fragmented, it is recommended that attention be paid to introducing a Life Skills/Moral Capabilities course into the school curriculum, and to increasing employment opportunities for young people.
Developing Moral Capabilities

Article 17 of the Convention for the Rights of the Child indicate that it is the responsibility of the State to “ensure that the child has access to information…from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at his/her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.” When adolescents were asked what information they felt they needed most in the Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey, nearly half said they needed more guidance in values identification and training in moral capabilities. On the other hand, only 5% of adolescents thought that morals affected the status of an individual in current society.

Young people are idealistic and hopeful. They long for justice, truth and unity. They wish for peace among nations, and for respect and courtesy between individuals. Yet they see around them a world torn by national, racial and religious conflicts, where injustice, exploitation and corruption brings wealth to a few and poverty to many, in spite of more than 50 years of development efforts.

Bathuig is the Head of the Education Department of the Mongolian State University, and a member of the project working group set up to increase community participation in school management. He emphasizes that access to information and formal education does not guarantee that those who are educated will respect the rights of others, or put justice and truth before any self interest. He believes that a radical transformation of values and attitudes is necessary, before any real change can take place.

“This reform of the school management structure is very much needed. We have been talking since 1990 – more than 10 years. It is going very slowly, because it all depends on changing attitudes within the community. It is necessary for everyone to understand generosity, sharing, the concepts of human rights, and the development of humanity as a whole. What is democratization? People think that is means freedom for individuals, but in fact in a true democracy everyone has their own responsibilities. Progress is slow and people cannot develop themselves, because this is not fully understood.

It is only morals that separate people from animals, but we cannot give moral education by lectures and seminars. It is about relationships between people. Governments are wrong to assume that if people have a good diploma they have a high level of education. In fact moral education should be the most important factor.

People are beginning to understand that this is slowing down transition to democracy – and not economics. Development takes place not as a result of sitting in a classroom at university, it is the development of ones moral capabilities. The criteria of education must be the extent to which it creates a person capable of living according to moral principles”.

Creating Employment Opportunities for Young People

We encourage young people to work hard, and to develop a sense of responsibility, and yet for many young Mongolians there is little hope of getting a job which will make use of their developing capacities and allow them to exercise their right to work. The parents of today’s adolescents were assured of full time employment in the command economy. However, they had little choice of what their profession should be and there was little need for initiative. Work was not seen as an expression of individual talents and skills.

When adolescents leave school, if there is no employment for them, they will lack an anchor in their lives and their sense of self-esteem will be impaired. The initiatives within ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescents’ have shown how adolescents thrive when they have a sense of purpose, and take responsibility for developing their community. A new attitude towards work needs to be developed, in which it is seen, not only as a means of livelihood, but also as an expression of the
potential of the individual and a contribution to the development of society. Productive work can become a source of joy and empowerment.

If adolescents’ participation is to be fully realized, the Government and its counterparts need to create employment opportunities for young people. Progress is not only about the development of human capabilities, but is also about the use that people can make of the capabilities they have acquired. Youth employment is a major participation issue. Attention should also be paid to creating opportunities for volunteerism. Innovative ways can be found to use the idealism, the optimism and the enthusiasm of youth to contribute to the development of Mongolian society.

A holistic approach

Reciprocity, cooperation and interconnectedness are principles without which there can be no radical transformation in society. One of the central aims of ‘Improving the Outlook of Mongolian Adolescent Girls (and Boys)’, was that there should be an integrated, sustainable and multi-sectoral approach to every stage of the project, including planning, implementation and evaluation.

There is ample evidence that a cooperative and integrated interagency approach is the most effective way of meeting the participation and development rights of the young people of Mongolia. In pilot areas there are very encouraging signs of cooperation between different aspects of the project and an appreciation at all levels, from the Governor’s office to out of school adolescents and their families, of the integrated approach from Government Ministries and UN agencies that is bringing about many positive changes in the lives of adolescents. Adolescents, parents, teachers and local authorities all enthusiastically testify to the visible benefits of a variety of programmes focused on every aspect of adolescents’ lives. At grass roots level, it is obvious that a multi-sectoral approach is achieving results, and adolescent participation is a key factor.

The project has succeeded in bringing together adolescents, NGOs, UN agencies and Government to cooperate in the areas of health, both formal and non-formal education, participation and communication. All are part of an integrated whole, but have so long been seen as separate, that a project which aims to integrate all these areas stands out as an example of good practice.

However, the fragmentation and lack of united vision and action, that is one of the main challenges for governments and international and national agencies, cannot be changed overnight. At the national level, the vision of a consultative framework, within which Government, UN agencies, adolescents, governmental and non-governmental organisation can plan and execute projects in an integrated multi-sectoral approach, is one that has not, as yet, been fully realized, in spite of the best of intentions. Although, during the planning stage, collaboration at national level was seen to be of central importance, it has proved difficult during the implementation stage, to co-ordinate the activities of the various Ministries and UN agencies, which have their own mandates and their own agendas, and are not necessarily very well informed of the details of activities of other agencies. Cooperation and consultation were seen as pre-requisites of success of the project and it is essential that time should be taken for and attention should be paid to united and coordinated action at every stage of the project cycle, so that confusions do not arise, and efforts are not duplicated.

“My dear young people: I see the light in your eyes, the energy of your bodies and the hope that is in your spirit. I know it is you, not I, who will make the future. It is you, not I, who will fix our wrongs and carry forward all that is right with the world.

I will only promise you what I know I can deliver. You have my word that I will continue to take all that I learned in my earliest days and all that I have learned since then, to protect your rights. I will work every day and in every way I know to support you as you grow. I will seek out your voices and your opinions and I will have others hear them too.”

Nelson Mandela
ANNEX 1

INTER-MINISTERIAL, INTER-AGENCY TASK FORCE

Vice-Minister of Health:                        Ms. N. Udval  Chairperson
Vice-Minister of Education:                    Mr. B. Erdenesuren   Deputy Chair
Vice-Minister of Social Welfare and Labour    Mr. Ch. Chinzorig   Deputy Chair
National Project Coordinator, UNFPA           Ms. N. Namuujin
International Cooperation Officer, MOH        Ms. G. Soyolgerel
Medical Officer, WHO                           Mr. Reijo Salmela
Resident Representative UNFPA                 Mr. Birat Simha
Programme Officer, UNICEF                     Ms. Frances Cosstick
Executive Director, MYDC                      Mr. M. Essunmunkh
Project Manager, UNESCO                        Ms. D. Oyunchimeg
NFE Officer, MOSTEC                           Ms. L. Orgilmaa
International Cooperation Officer, MOH        Ms. V. Surechimeg
Programme Officer, UNFPA                      Mr. Ole Ramsing
Director, NFE Centre                          Ms. Y. Batchuluun
Chairman, National Board for Children          Ms. M Togtokhnyam
Head of Department of Primary Education       Mr. G. Batbold

ADOLESCENTS BOARD

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N. Suvdsuren                                  T. Nominzuul
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Oyunzuul                                      Nyamzuren
Mr. B. Ankbayar (band member)                 Mr. D. Esunerdene (band member)
Mr. N. Ariunbold (band member)

COORDINATING SUPPORT UNIT

Ms. D. Oyunchimeg  Task Force Secretary, Head of Public Health Dept Ministry of Health
Ms. J. Gerelmaa   Assistant Secretary, Deputy Chief Commissioner Mongolian Scouts Association
Ms. Sarantuya    National Board for Children

List of Acronyms and Terms
ADC          Adolescent Development Centre
AIDS         Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
Aimag        Mongolian Province
Bagh         Smallest administrative division. Soums are divided into baghs (hamlet)
CRC          Convention on the Rights of the Child
Ger          Traditional Mongolian round felt tent, built on a structure of wooden poles
HIV          Human Immune Deficiency Virus
MANAS        Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey, 2000
MOH          Ministry of Health
MOSEC        Ministry of Science, Education and Culture
MOSWL        Ministry of Social Welfare and Labour
MYDC         Mongolian Youth Development Centre
NCC          National Committee for Children
NBC          National Board for Children
NGO          Non governmental organisation
SAM          Scouts Association of Mongolia
STI          Sexually Transmitted Infection
Soum         Administrative division. Aimag are divided into soums (village)
UNCT         United Nations Country Team
UNDP         United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO       United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNF          United Nations Foundation
UNFPA        United National Population Fund
UNICEF       United Nations Children’s Fund
WHO          World Health Organisation