

Will change in government lead to improvement of Mongolia's environmental sector?

The Mongolian Democratic Party (MDP) won a majority in the parliamentary election in 2012. The MDP is a powerful party in the coalition and has shown a strong interest in local self governance and a strong fiscal decentralisation by supporting the new Budget Law of 2012 (Jargalsaikhany, December 12th 2012, Eurasia Daily Monitor). The MDP won 12 Aimags and the majority of the capital city electorates in the local government election in December 2012, which could mobilise local level politics with the party's agenda (Jargalsaikhany, December 12th 2012, Eurasia Daily Monitor). The Civil Will Green Party (CWGP), as one coalition partner in the government, demonstrates more concern over environmental protection in the party's manifesto (Interview, CWGP 2012.09.26).

The Ministry of Nature, Environment and Green Development (MNEGD) is headed by the CWGP in the new government. Mongolia is considered a vulnerable country in climate change scenarios. Currently, the Gobi Desert covers around 30% of Mongolia. The rest of the country contains semi-arid or arid areas. Geographically Mongolia is a land-locked country with low precipitation. It is

estimated that annual mean temperatures have increased by 2.1°C since the 1940s (Batimaa et al. 2011). The impact of climate change in Mongolia rapidly deteriorates water availability.

Mongolia has rich mineral resources which are directly used for many industrial products by industries in developed countries. Multinational companies have established mining plants in many parts of Mongolia. Economic liberalisation accelerates the trend of investment by foreign mining industries. The mining industry, while boosting the Mongolian economy, affects the ecosystem heavily. It means that the factor for the economic blessing is creating insecure human wellbeing in the countryside. The leakage of chemicals and



the discharging of wastewater into surface water and groundwater leads to emerging water pollution and directly effects economic development and human wellbeing (Tsogtbaatar et al. 2009). In our field research with the research team of the National University of Mongolia about Environmental Flow Assessment in Orkhan River in Mongolia, we interviewed local people including herders and farmers, and governance officers such as governors, local

parliament members, environmental protectors, natural inspectors and water security officers in the river basin.

In the first photo, the mixing of the contaminated Orkhan River water with the main Orkhan River can be viewed. This water is being polluted by the mining industries in the upper catchment areas of the Orkhan River. The mining industry was started since 1993. Most of them



were given licenses by the Aimag Government without proper Environmental Impact Assessment and without any public consultation. We were not allowed to enter the the upper part of the river where the mining industry has gained a foothold (the second photo). This mining industry is located directly on the natural source of Orkhan River. Local people express their concern about arbitrary mining industries activities. They always struggle with these companies. They told us that these lands belong to them and they do not want to leave from their homeland. We can be witnesses on how these companies block the natural water flow and by washing mining material with Arsenic and other chemicals. The downstream local people and governors also complain about the situation of the

poisoning of the Orkhan River Water which led to a decrease in water quality.

Another threat is that water quantity is decreasing as a result of climate change. It is a significant factor when comparing local peoples views about water quantity in last 20 years. However, the local people's right to drink pure water, food security and the right to secure their homeland are being violated in these areas as the negative consequences of arbitrary and profit-oriented mining industry.

The impact of the global green development discourse in Mongolian governance strategies can be observed through the renaming of the environment ministry to the Ministry of Nature, Environment and Green Development in the

new government. Water and forests are the main themes of the MNEDG. Water management is one priority of the MNEDG with reforestation and pollution eradication (Byambadorj, October 5th, 2012 UBPOST). There has been institutional restructuring in water and forest management and governance. By terminating the Water Authority, the power was brought into the ministry (Interview, 2012.10.01; Byambadorj, October 5th, 2012 UBPOST). Concerning the water sector, the new government policy demonstrates priority over river headwaters and protected zones of water reservoirs within a comprehensive water management policy (The coalition government platform, 2012).

People in Mongolia are waiting for justice and real human wellbeing concerning environmental protection. Multinational companies and mining companies get rich by giving little or no compensation to Mongolian people. Even in the development plan of Mongolia, the balancing of development across the country is neglected. Neoliberal economic policies only lead to development for Ulaanbaatar, the capital city, where 2/3 of Mongolian population reside. This sustains the issue of income distribution with a minority of the population (mainly derived through profits from mining) owning the largest amount of wealth while the majority are resigned to poverty. This reality would explain the rhythmic idiom about Mongolian which I overheard: *“Mongolia is not only Ulaanbaatar and is not only for a few rich people”*.

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