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*Literacy for Life*

## Literacy country study: Mongolia

Dr. Batchuluun Yembuu  
Ms. Khulan Munkh-Erdene

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**Dr. Batchuluun Yembuu**  
Director, National Centre for  
Non Formal and Distance Education,  
Ministry of Education,  
Culture and Science

**Ms. Khulan Munkh-Erdene**  
Education Officer,  
Mongolian National  
Commission for UNESCO

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## Abbreviations

ACCU	Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO
ADB	Asian Development Bank
EFA	Education for All
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organization
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Report
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MoECS	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
MPRP	Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party
NFDE	National Centre for Non Formal and Distance Education
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NHRC	National Human Right's Commission
NSO	National Statistical Office
UB	Ulaanbaatar
UNDP	United Nations Development Proramme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNLD	United Nations Literacy Decade

# 2006 EFA Global Monitoring Report - Literacy Country Study – Mongolia

*Batchuluun Yembuu & Khulan Munkh-Erdene*

## I. Introduction

Since 1990 Mongolia has embarked on a path of building a democratic society which respects human rights and is committed to developing a market economy, undertaking sweeping changes and reforms touching all spheres of social life.

Latest statistics of 2004 counted 2573.5 thousand people residing in Mongolia, of which 57.4 percent live in urban areas (with 32 percent of population concentrated in capital city-Ulaanbaatar) and 42.6 percent who live in rural areas. Of the total population, 50.4 percent are women and 49.6 percent are men, and 35.8 percent of the population is children aged 0-14. The population density is 1.5 persons per square km, making Mongolia one of the least densely populated countries in the World. Before 1990s growth rate average was 2.7, but afterwards this indicator declined to 1.3 by 2003 with the total fertility rate remaining around 2.1 children per woman. The main stay of economy is nomadic style livestock. Currently there are 10 heads of livestock per capita.

Mongolia is ranked to 117<sup>th</sup> place among 177 countries by Human Development Index. According to Census of 2000, adult literacy rate 97.8 percent, where 98 percent male and 97.5 percent female.

Administratively, Mongolia is divided into 22 major administrative units, including 21 aimags and capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Aimag populations vary and range between 12,500 and 122,000 people, they also vary in size with the largest covering as much as 165,4 square kilometers of territory. An aimag is comprised of up to 27 soums, including the aimag centre. Soums in turn are comprised of baghs. In Mongolia there are 331 soums and 1,550 baghs. Also, the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, is subdivided into 121 service districts called khoros<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1). Bagh residents mainly lead a nomadic life. They migrate with their herds depending on the change in season and weather conditions.

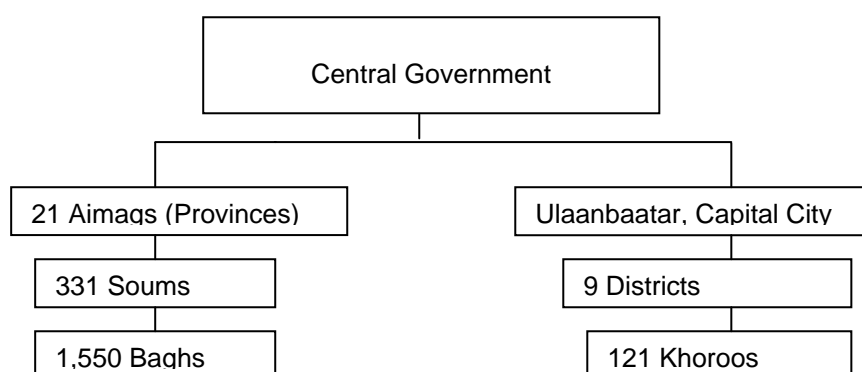
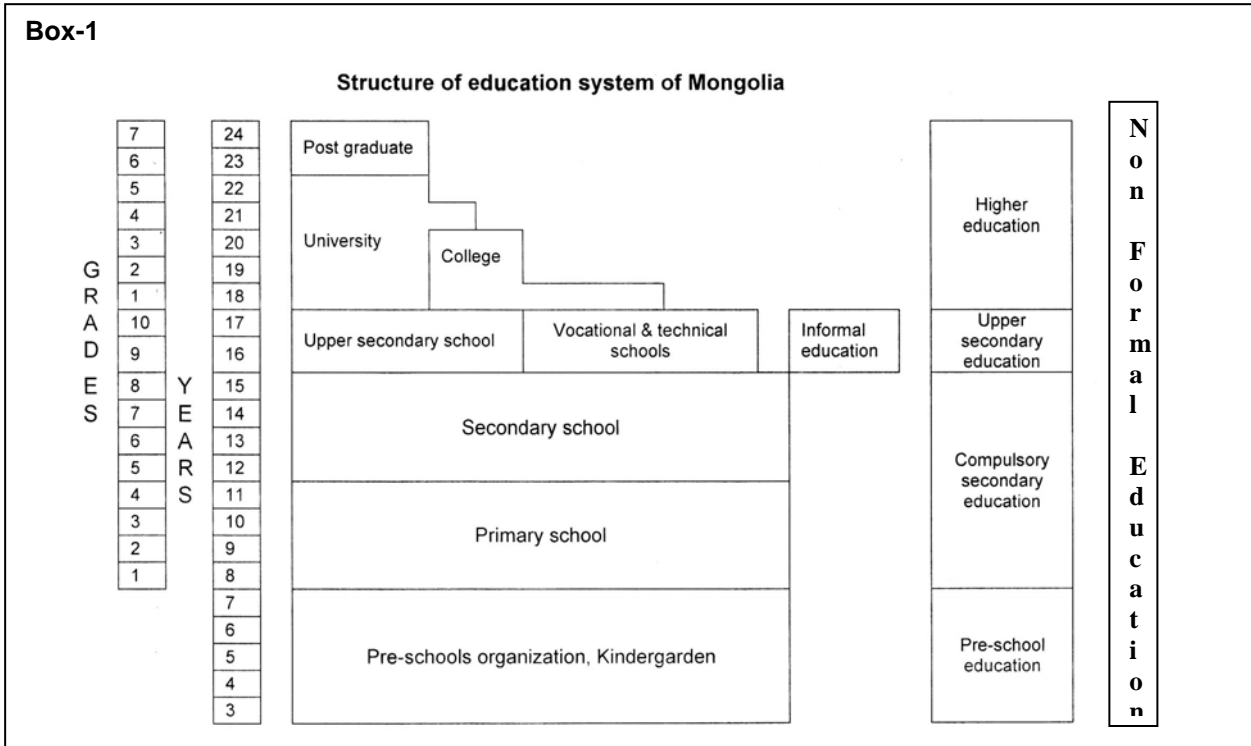


Figure 1. Administrative Structure of Mongolia  
Source: NSO, Mongolian Statistical Yearbook 2002.

<sup>1</sup> Human Development Report Mongolia-2003. P 21



Source: Working Report of National Observatory. 2003.

## II. Literacy Education: Past and Present

### 2.1. Definition of literacy and illiteracy

Although the clear indicator and criteria does not exist to define terms of “*literate*” and “*illiterate*” in Mongolia, as defined in the Human Development Reports an “*Adult Literacy Rate*” is defined as “the percentage of people aged 15 and above who can read and write a short, simple statement” and “*Illiteracy Rate*” is “percentage of people aged 15 and above who can not read and write a short, simple statement”<sup>2</sup>. According to the sole definition which was used in Population and Housing Census of 2000 the term “*Literacy*” is defined as “ability to read and write a short simple statement in Mongolian or any other language with understanding”<sup>3</sup>. Usually, research works and literature refer to the following definitions, namely *illiterate*, *neo-literate*, *literate*, *functionally literate*.

*Illiterate* is a person who is not able to read and write, but in Mongolian case major part of illiterates could perform simple mathematical functions to use in their daily life.

*Neo-literate* signify a person who is able to perform very basic tasks like to read a sentence word by word and to make a copy of what is written without fully understanding of its meaning. In other words, this is a person who got acquainted with the basic principles of reading, writing and numerating techniques, but who is unable to continue further training without teacher or instructor.

<sup>2</sup> Human Development Report 2003, P.78

<sup>3</sup> Internal Migration and Urbanization in Mongolia: Analysis based on the 2000 Census.UB., 2002. P.141

*Literate* is a person who has strong willingness to improve his/her educational level, e.g. one who has reached a certain level of education to make use of his/her skills regardless how much time is passed.

*Functionally literate* person is one who is capable to take advantage of his/her acquired skills in daily life.

As a result of the surveys to measure literacy level of population, it was classified into *elementary, advanced, practical or pragmatical levels* within the framework "Literate" project in 1998<sup>4</sup>. If we compare these different definitions, literacy levels is classified as *illiterate, elementary level or neo-literate, pragmatical level or literate and functionally literate*. Those 4 literacy levels are currently used by the Government as a national classification.

Nevertheless, in the last years the researchers define the literacy in a broader sense, as "not only one's ability to read and write, but also the ability to communicate with others" In other words, literacy is defined not only from the linguistic perspective, but also as a necessity for every civilized person to collaborate and live in harmony with others. The new era of globalization demands the highest level skills and in this connection, literacy includes also science literacy, mathematics literacy and computer literacy concepts. For example, under the concept "science literacy" is understood someone who is well acquainted with the basic principles of natural sciences and who is able to make good use of his/her knowledge<sup>5</sup>.

## **2.2. Literacy Education Before 1990**

At the beginning of 20th century the Mongolian society was underdeveloped one with literacy rate below 10 percent, average life expectancy below 40 years, high child mortality and almost without any formal education and health services except Buddhist faculties. As a result of the national movement for independence in 1911 and the revolution of 1921, opportunities were created for people to access to education and health services free of charge regardless of ethnicity, gender, wealth or religion. 5164 functional literate persons (3.0 %) and semiliterate (able to read, but unable to write) were 5.0 percent of the whole population by the 1921 (Damdinsuren.Ts, 1969). At that time, the Mongols used the old script called "Uigarjin" which is written from top to down and writing differs from reading.

After Revolution 1921, the priority of the Government was to provide literacy education, establish schools, prepare literacy teachers and efforts were directed at the elimination of adult illiteracy. The first state primary school founded of 40 students and 2 teachers in 1921 education was made compulsory and free of charge for all children in 1925. Since 1922, teachers started to attend short time courses of 4 months. By 1938, 12226 students were enrolled in 118 primary schools and one year later in 1939/1940 25840 students enrolled in 338 schools. 0.93 percent of the whole population was schooling in 1930 comparing to 3.5 percent in 1940<sup>6</sup>.

Years between 1930-1950 were most effective time to eliminate illiteracy. Many activities were initiated by communities and the slogan "*Master literacy first, and then teach others*" was the order of the day so that literate person automatically became

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<sup>4</sup> Report of the project "Literate", Ulaanbaatar., 1998

<sup>5</sup> Jadamba.B. Literacy education. "Open School" Newsletter. No 4, 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Shagdar.Sh. History of Education. UB., 2003. P

the teacher of the next ten illiterates. As a result of these measurements the number of literates was getting up year by year, by 1926 they were 10 thousand and 127 thousand or 17.3% of the population by 1940 (Table. 1).

Table 1. Progress of literacy (1921-1957)

Year	Population (thousand)	Age of involved group	Number of literates	Percentage
1921	647.5	All population	5964	3.0
1935	738.2	All population	36162	4.9
1940	738.6	9-50	127650	17.3
1947	759.3	9-50	263400	59.8
1950	758.9	9-50	347200	73.5
1956	845.5	9-50	519900	95.5
1957	865.0	8-45	444423	93.4

Source: Shagdar.Sh (2003). History of Mongolian Education

The goal of universal primary schooling was reached at the beginning of 1950's. In 1951, 13648 students were entering primary school, 9304 graduates or completion rate became 68.2% in 1955 (Table 2); coverage became 92.8% in 1956/1957 and 97.7% in 1957/1958 school year.

Table 2. Primary school completion rate (1947-1954)

1947-1951	1951-1955	1952-1956	1954-1958
61.0	68.2	71.1	74.6

The non-formal education (NFE) played a crucial role to provide the literacy education for adults. Small sized classroom trainings were organized for rural workers, herders and housewives. Almost every newly literate person was enrolled in a short term course to become a literacy teacher, especially during the World War II. Community based and non formal styled institutions of literacy and vocational training for adults were set up between 1930-1933. For example, one-year training courses were organized by "Schools for economical skills", from 1934 a number of "Public Voluntary schools" and graduates could be transmitted to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade of primary school. By 1934, there were 18000 children enrolled in Buddhist schools and 5000 children in state primary schools<sup>7</sup>. Also, "Summer schools" started to operate from 1936. As reported in "History of Education" by Prof. Shagdar.Sh, 37 summer schools were established within one year. Action Plan of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (MPRP) in 1940 stated that "to assist people with eradicating the illiteracy by providing free of charge primary and secondary education, as well as with establishing "Public voluntary schools". In addition, a decree was issued to set up a primary school under each monastery. In 1955, by a decree of the Board of Ministers 7-year "Evening school" and "School for workers" was established exclusively for adults<sup>8</sup>.

However, during these years official scripts were changed three times. The 6<sup>th</sup> Congress of MPRP (1930) stated that "the old Mongolian script is no longer effective to use, therefore the Latin script should be adopted and applied in Mongolia since it is widely used around the world"<sup>9</sup>. According to the Government policy, preparation and

<sup>7</sup> General secondary schools during the Revolution 1921-1940. Ulaanbaatar.,1967.P.23

<sup>8</sup> Shagdar.Sh. History of Education. UB., 2003. P. 58

<sup>9</sup> General secondary schools during the Revolution 1921-1940. Ulaanbaatar.,1967 P. 25

adaptation to use of the Latin script started from 1931 which was practiced during the next 10 years<sup>10</sup>. The decree to adopt the Latin script was issued on 21 February 1941, but right one month later another decree by the Central Committee of the MPRP<sup>11</sup> has come out to adopt the Cyrillic script, to fit the principles of the socialist system guided by the former Soviet Union (Later in 1990 there was an attempt to revive the old Mongolian script and the rationale behind that decision was the enhanced patriotism after the collapse of the socialist system).

Although, by 1940 population of Mongolia was 738.6 thousand and 17.3 percent became literate, after shifting into Cyrillic, illiteracy rate re-increased. Nevertheless, the Cyrillic alphabet, where reading does not differ from writing, had positively influenced this relatively rapid progress of literacy education. For instance, as a result of new literacy campaign on Cyrillic which started in 1941, 18 thousand people became literate within one year, 295807 people (or 40 percent) became literate in 1941-1948, by 1951 adult literacy rate became 87%; by 1960 72.6%.

A nationwide *Cultural Campaign* during 1959-1961 set a goal to reach the universal primary education for adults and one of the 3 slogans was “to move one step forward to improve the education”<sup>12</sup>. Referring to the report of this campaign in 1961, the number of illiterates was reduced to 2924 which is 0.3 percent of the population aged above 8. In the report of MPRP’s 14<sup>th</sup> Congress, it was highlighted that Mongolia had eradicated the illiteracy. Following the decree which was issued in 1966, entitled “Measures to improve the basic education of workers” contributed to promote post-literacy programs for adults. UNESCO rewarded the “Prize of Nadejda Krupskaya” in 1970 the Science Academy of Mongolia for the efforts in eliminating illiteracy (Table 3).

Table 3. Literacy rates of the population, 1963-1990 (percentage)\*

Year	Total	Male	Female
1963	72.6	80.5	64.8
1969	82.1	88.9	75.3
1979	93.3	96.5	90.2
1989	97.0	98.4	95.7

\* Source: National Statistical Office, 1997.

By 1989, literacy rates were reported as 97.0 percent and enrollment rates as 98 percent for primary education (UNDP, 1997). A high rate of female participation and gender equity in the education system was achieved, similar to that of Eastern European countries but higher than in most other Asian countries during the socialist time<sup>13</sup>.

**2.3. The Impact of Economic Transition on Literacy Education**

The most immediate impact of economic transition was a fall in success of literacy education. At the beginning of 1990, when the country started to transfer to the market economy, drop-out rate sharply increased. In the school year of 1992-1993,

<sup>10</sup> Achieving universal literacy education 1921-1964 Ulaanbaatar., 1967.P. 183, 186  
<sup>11</sup> Decrees and orders related to education and culture 1940-1961. Ulaanbaatar., 1962  
<sup>12</sup> Documents related to the history of MPRP. 1940-1960 Second book. Ulaanbaatar.,1967 P 534  
<sup>13</sup> Robinson.B. Economic transition and educational change in Mongolia in the 1990s. UB., 2002.

over 30 thousand children dropped out of the schools and it took 8.8% of total students which was the highest point (Figure 2). Boys took more than 70% of total drop outs. Main reason was those rural children from herder families and who dropped out of the schools to help their parents to look after the privatized livestock. *Secondly* it was caused by the lack of value placed on education. Herders tended to think that education is not essential whilst the livestock meant a wealth. Even, at that time, number of teachers and doctors were leaving their work to make their own business. The drop-out increase and decline in enrollment rate impacted negatively in literacy acquisition. Nowadays public tendency has changed in a positive way which favors the drop-out decline.

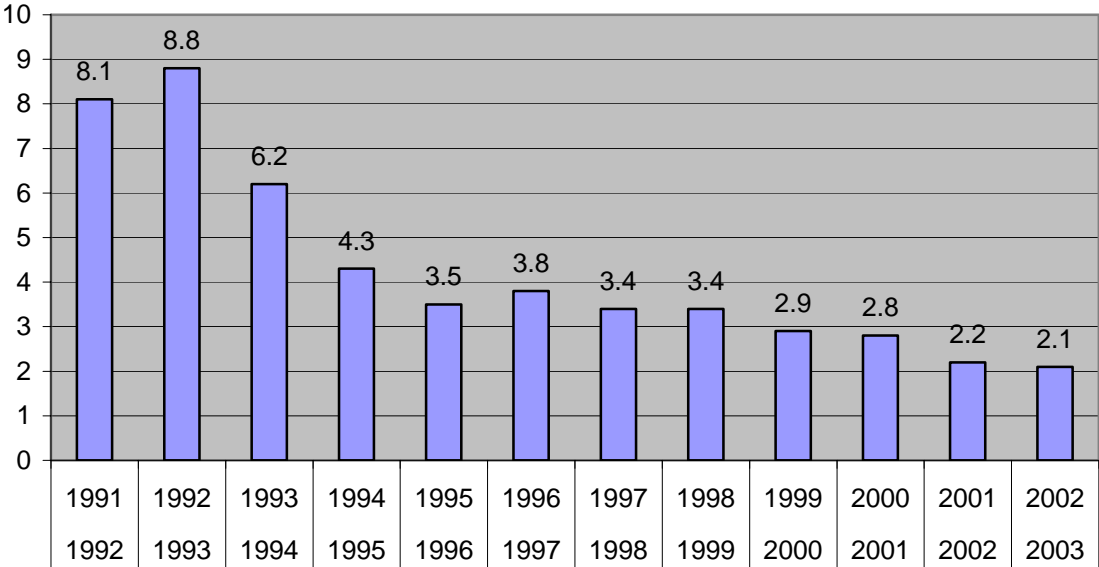


Figure 2. .Drop out rate after 1990

By 2001, the school enrollment rate for children aged 8-15 years is 86.5 percent (girls 89.6 percent and boys 83.4 percent) and the drop-out rate is 2.8 percent (girls 2.4 percent and boys 3.2 percent). The drop-out rate is higher in rural areas – 3.7 percent, as opposed to urban areas – 1.4 percent. Out of the total number of children not attending school, 43.8 percent do not attend due to low living conditions and the need to work. This increase in drop out rates has become one of main reasons of chronic poverty in the country.

In the census of 2000, the adult literacy rate was 97.8 percent, male 98.0 and female 97.5 per cent, whereas 2.2 per cent or 34011 adults above 15 were illiterate<sup>14</sup>. However, a specific test was not used and it was identified by self-declaration. Even these statistics have been used as an official source, but those who are registered as *“literate and not-educated”* classification in the census of 2000, make 3.2 per cent of population<sup>15</sup> and it is doubtful that they could be considered as literates.

Five years passed since the last census and the following facts could be estimated that the illiteracy has been increased since 2000:

<sup>14</sup> The population and housing census, Ulaanbaatar., 2000

<sup>15</sup> The population and housing census, Ulaanbaatar., 2000



- Total number of 68000 children aged between 8-15 were out-of-school as of 2000 and most of them dropped out at the primary school level or never attended school. Nowadays these children became adults (source: NSO, MoECS, 2000).
- According to the analysis made on the basic education enrolment, 12.6 per cent or 28800 primary school aged children (aged 8-11) dropped out of school as of 2004, whereas 23.7 per cent or 10876 children aged 8-15 did not attend school at all (source NSO, MoECS, 2000).
- 27.2 per cent of military personnel engaged by the Military Forces of Mongolia in the first half of 2005 have primary school education and 5.5 per cent are illiterate. However, most of military servants with primary education, lack of reading and writing skills (source Ministry of Defense 2005).

In this regard, addressing the needs of illiterate, neo-literate youth and adults is becoming one of the challenges of NFE sector.

#### 2.4. Current Situation and Trends of Literacy Education

According to the Education Law, Mongolia will shift to 11 years of schooling (5+4+2) from 2005-2006 academic year. Due to greater attention paid by the Government towards the creation of a condition wherein children are fully enrolled in schooling and school drop-out rates are reduced in the last years.

There are big differences between urban and rural on literacy education as well as poverty level (Table 4, Figure 3). 73.4 percent of illiterate youth are from the rural areas.

Table 4. Urban and rural disparity

	Urban (percentage)	Rural (percentage)
Population <sup>a</sup>	57.4	42.6
Illiterate rate <sup>b</sup> (as of 2000)	1.1	3.8
Literate, not educated population <sup>c</sup>	1.7	5.5
Out-of-school children aged 8-15 <sup>d</sup> (as of 2004)	16.8	83.2
Enrollment rate <sup>e</sup>	82.7	62.1
Human development index <sup>f</sup>	0.723	0.636
Poverty (as of 1998) <sup>g</sup>	39.4	32.6
Poor people's settlement <sup>e</sup> (as of 1998)	57.0	43.0
Population without access to safe water <sup>h</sup> (as of 2000)	9.2	65.6

Source: a,b,c-Population and Housing Census 2000, NSO of Mongolia, UB., 2002.

d,e –Statistical book of MoECS, 2003-2004

f,g,h-HDR 2003, P.26



a

b

Figure 3. a) Out-of-school children aged 8-15

b) Out of school boys and girls (by 2004)

Although the drop out is decreasing in the last years (2.1% in 2004), annually 12-13.0 thousand children are still out of school. Nowadays, major part of the illiterates and neo-literates are those who dropped-out of school in the early 1990s. Poverty and inappropriate activities of schools and teachers are somehow affecting the drop out rate. School-aged children from migrant families are not fully enrolled to schools in urban areas including the capital city Ulaanbaatar.

In socialist era, the government strived to equalize opportunities in rural and urban areas by investing in the countryside, and maintaining strict control over migration. With Mongolia's economy undergoing rapid and deep structural change, poverty on the rise, and no adequate social safety net, people began to move in search of better opportunities and means to survive. Mongolia's new constitution allows people to move freely. Mongolians migrated from cities to the countryside and especially later in this decade from rural areas to cities<sup>16</sup>.

NFE learning centres, called "Gegeerel" (Enlightenment) centres which are functioning nationwide play a crucial role to provide literacy education and retraining these out-of-school children and youth, as well as to provide post-literacy programs for adults on life skills, income generating activities, health, ecology education and so on. According to the Law of Education (2002), the national education system consists of formal and non-formal education activities devoted to the various target groups of the population.

The "Gegeerel" centres started to operate within the framework of the National Program on NFE Development (1997-2004). UNESCO project, entitled "Learning for Life" contributed much to sustainability of these centers. As of 2004, 492 NFE facilitators and teachers work in 349 NFE learning centres around Mongolia, at least one in each soum or district. NFE facilitators are responsible of those centres which provide non-formal and literacy education to local people.

Total number of 23813 adults was involved in the literacy training, 9602 people – in the basic education courses, more than 30000 people – in the vocational and life skills development and post literacy programs between 1997-2004.

The Minister of Education, Culture and Science signed an order<sup>17</sup> to adopt the *Equivalency Program* in 2001 which differ from the formal education content in terms of methodology. These programs aim at providing basic education to out-of-school youth in an appropriate form and according to their time availability. They are developed on the basis of formal education standards to meet the specific needs of its target group and based on the open and flexible principle. The content includes 75 percent of formal education standards and the main advantage is that people could choose the time according to their availability. 1/3 of the content is delivered in

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<sup>16</sup> Mongolian Human Development Report. 2003.P.42

<sup>17</sup> Order of the Minister of Education, Culture and Science. #283. 5 Sept. 2001.

classrooms and the remaining part is acquired independently or according to relevancy of the learners.

After completing the program, people have opportunity to be transmitted to formal schooling, depending on evaluation results. The equivalency programs consist of 5 packages which are *humanitarian science, mathematics and computer science, natural science, social science and technology*. Currently we are using 2 textbooks for primary and 7 textbooks for basic education of equivalency program. These textbooks were developed by NFDE with the financial support of ILO/IPEC and UNICEF. The NFDE organizes capacity building trainings for NFE facilitators and supplies them with guidelines and hand-outs. There are 28356 youth aged 8-15 and adults involved in Equivalency Programme in “Gegeerel” centres 2001-2004.

### **III. Long Term Objectives and Commitments by Government**

The Government of Mongolia has committed itself in promoting the literacy education by adopting several National Programmes. The most important one is “**Government Action Plan**” which is adopted every 4 years. In the Action Plan of 2004-2008 there was introduced a special item on the school drop-out and retraining issue, more precisely, the Government is committed to support civil society initiatives towards provision of compulsory education to school dropouts and adults who had no opportunity to study at schools;

The second document, entitled “**National Programme on NFE Development**” (1997-2004). One of the main objectives was to improve the literacy education of population. The program states as its mission the establishment and development an educational structure that enables each citizen to continue the learning process throughout their lives. According to the program, following 6 main directions were set up to promote the NFE: *1. to provide literacy education, 2. to provide retraining, 3. to improve general knowledge in different areas like legal, health, ecology education etc., 4. to provide vocational education, 5. to assist people to enhance the creative activities and life skills, 6. to help people to learn independently.*

The third document is the “**National Mid Term Action Plan on Education for All**”, approved in 2002 with the objective to fulfill the goals within the Dakar Framework for Action. This plan focuses on the following three goals:

1. Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children and children from herder families
2. Providing quality basic education for all children
3. Reducing illiteracy and ensuring the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs

The fourth and the most recent one, entitled “**National Programme on Literacy Education**” (2004-2012) was adopted in December 2004 within the framework of UNLD. As a main reference document to promote literacy education in Mongolia, following objectives were set-up:

- to eradicate the illiteracy by reaching 99,9% of adult literacy rate by 2008; establish gender balance; to reach 99% of school enrollment rate by 2012
- to set-up an effective mechanism of monitoring and evaluation based on existing information data base and survey results
- to strengthen the partnership among stakeholders and increase public participation; enhance international co-operation
- create a favorable social and cultural environment to promote literacy
- conducting wide range of studies and surveys related to literacy issues
- developing relevant training materials, organizing wide range of training and capacity building

It is evident that the role of NFE is considerable to achieve these objectives, especially the “Literacy Resource Centre” Programme established by ACCU at the NFDE, is considered to serve as a main resource centre.

**Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper** is closely linked to the literacy education since one of the instruments to alleviate poverty is to improve the educational level of the population. The following Government policy strategies and objectives are being set up to promote literacy education<sup>18</sup>:

- to improve the literacy education quality
- to set up a system where educational services are accessible in all areas, particularly in rural, and to support the need of the low income group to obtain education.
- to reduce the drop out rate, and to increase the coverage of basic education up to 90.5% by 2006 and to provide literacy education for drop outs.
- to expand possibilities to fully cover the children from herder and poor families, and the children with disabilities

## IV. Expenditure and Management of Literacy Education

The Law on Education states that not less than 20 percent of the annual budget is to be spent on educational sector. Between 1975 and 1990, education took the largest share (about 45 percent) of Government expenditure on social development.

Expenditure on education in 1980s was over 10 percent of GDP, about 17.7 percent of total Government expenditure. Before transition began, there was relatively heavy investment in education and the state carried virtually all costs.

In 2000, the Government expenditure on education has been increased to 19.1 percent (Table 5).

*Table 5. Total Expenditure on Education Sector\**

Year	percent in total budget expenditure	percent in GDP
1995	17.0	4.6
1996	15.9	4.0
1997	16.2	5.7
1998	17.1	7.1
1999	17.8	7.0
2000	19.1	7.9

<sup>18</sup> Economic Growth Support and Poverty Reduction Strategy. UB.,2003. P.130

2001	20.4	8.9
2002	19.8	8.5

\*Source: MDG Report. 2003.

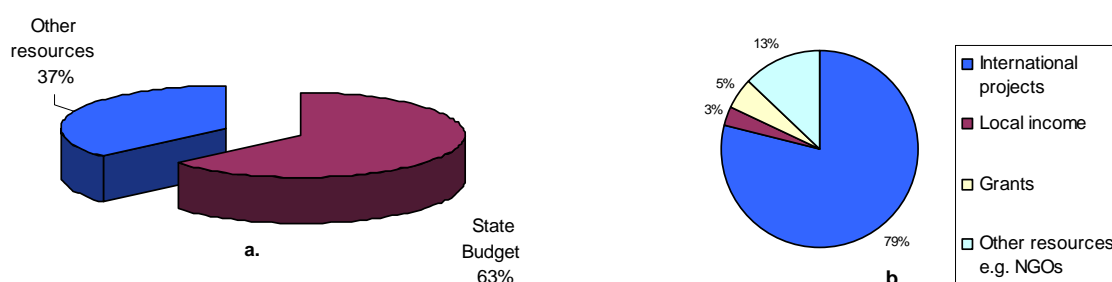
Part of funding provided by the Government to education sector is spent on literacy education through NFE. The NFE sector is mainly funded by donor agencies from 1997, especially the 3 UNESCO projects: “Gobi women” (1992-1996), “Learning for Life” (1997-2001) and “Adolescents” (2001-2004), played a considerable role to promote NFE.

Beginning from 2003 the Government started to allocate funds for NFE, including the literacy education. 257 million tugrug (Tg)<sup>19</sup> in 2003 and 331 million Tg in 2004 were spent and 350 million Tg is intended to be allocated in 2005 for NFE. However, local authorities decide themselves the allocations for literacy training. It depends on different illiteracy rates, training organization forms, local authority’s tendencies. For instance in 2004, 18 million Tg were allocated to NFE activities and literacy training in Uvs aimag.

Besides, funds from various resources are spent on development and production of different literacy learning materials as well as on trainings of trainees. For example, 12 million Tg were spent from UNESCO on printing out of the literacy textbook, entitled “Eye of wisdom” in 2004.

The literacy education trainings are conducted under the direct responsibility of the MoECS and its agencies, as well as Educational and Cultural Departments of each aimag. Other Ministries are being involved in indirect way. For instance, posters and hand-outs produced by the Ministry of Health are indeed to improve literacy level to meet people’s needs.

Also, different NGOs play an important role in promoting literacy. Though NGO is a quite new concept in Mongolia, started to be established from 1990’s, currently there are around 100 NGOs working with out-of-school children, vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to provide literacy education from total 2500 NGOs. For example, “Child Right’s Centre”, which is one of sustainable NGOs, conducts wide range of literacy activities and trainings in Ulaanbaatar and in selected aimags. During the period of 2001-2004, the total expenditure on NFE and literacy was 1,270.0 million Tg, where 805.0 million (63 percent) were allocated from the State budget and 465.0 million from other resources: international projects, grants, local income etc.<sup>20</sup> (Figure 4).



<sup>19</sup> Tugrug (Tg) is the national currency and as of 2004 1 \$ US is 1200 Tg

<sup>20</sup> Final report of Implementation of NFE National Program. UB., 2004.

Figure 4. a) Total expenditure on NFE and Literacy education 2001-2004. b) Other resources

Also international NGOs are supporting different projects to promote literacy. "World Vision-Mongolia", provided literacy education and retraining for school drop outs and total number of 350-450 children are involved every year since its foundation in 1993. ADRA which started to work in Mongolia from 1997, has organized literacy courses in 5 selected provinces. However, their activities focus more on children, therefore illiterate, neo-literate adults, parents of school drop-outs etc are left beyond. In addition, the quality of literacy training of various organizations remains outside of scope and it's crucial to establish an appropriate monitoring, evaluation and coordination mechanism.

The management of literacy education provision is ensured by the top to bottom approaches.

*At the national level*, the literacy training is managed by the MoECS and through its agency, the National Non-Formal and Distance Education Centre. Based on the data provided by different aimags and number of illiterates to be trained, the local Governor makes contract with the MoECS.

*At the aimag level*, the literacy training is managed by the Educational and Cultural Department, through NFE methodologists whereas the NFE facilitators/teachers are responsible *at the soum level* jointly with the local schools. In general, the literacy trainings are conducted by primary school teachers, volunteers and retired former teachers. The training's duration is 2-3 weeks with around 15-20 people in one group. Since considerable part of illiterates is nomads, the training period is flexible and mostly conducted in summer. The NFDE assist NGOs by providing them teaching/learning materials and capacity building of teaching personnel. For instance, more than 100 teachers of NGOs have been involved in training in 2004.

External aid is important to promote the literacy education in Mongolia. UN agencies like UNESCO, UNICEF, ILO/IPEC play crucial role in this regard. For example, currently, UNESCO is running a pilot project aiming to provide the mobile educational and cultural services to herders which is highly welcomed by target group.

ADB and JICA support the Government in school rehabilitation, non-formal education, and development of community based approaches to primary education. DANIDA supports the development of rural schools. All these activities could be considered as significant in efforts to improve levels of literacy.

## **V. Innovative Programmes and Campaigns on Literacy Education**

Beginning from the 1990s several literacy programmes and campaigns were undertaken and not all were successful. Below are cited some of the initiatives.

- 1) Following the statement of the Government Action Plan of 1990, "Organize the universal training of the old Mongolian script-"Uigarjin" nationwide"<sup>21</sup>, the latter took place of the Cyrillic script in 1992. Big campaign was launched

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<sup>21</sup> Government Action Plan. Ulaanbaatar., 1992

among people to learn the “Uigarjin” script and was introduced from the first grade of schools from 1990/1991. Neither this campaign failed, nor it has somehow resulted in literacy rate decline and drop-out increase. The reasons of this failure are:

- The learning environment of “Uigarjin” was almost non-existent and it couldn’t become of universal use among population.
  - Lack of financial and human resources: few people aged above 50 and people majored in Mongolian language knew this script. Therefore, there was considerable shortage of teachers. Some textbooks were developed, but technical facilities were non-sufficient to meet needs of all schools.
  - People were not psychologically prepared to this change. Majority of youth preferred to dedicate their time to learn English and computer, instead of “loosing time” with the old script.
- 2) Within the framework of “Youth year” proclaimed in 1998, a project entitled “Literate” was implemented and it was aimed to train illiterates aged between 10-18. 2 books namely “Alphabet” and “Mathematic” including the guidelines were developed accordingly. As a result of this project 7686 people became literate<sup>22</sup>.
  - 3) By the decree of Prime Minister, the literacy campaign was organized in May 2000 with duration of one month and prior to Parliamentarian election held in June 2000. Within its framework, 10000 copies of literacy booklet, entitled “Pocket alphabet” were produced and distributed. Elections resulted in victory of the MPRP, consequently, this initiative did not fully succeed because of small term and weak organization.
  - 4) Within the framework of UN Literacy Decade, initiated by Mongolia, “Summer literacy Campaigns” is being organized since 2003. In 2003 8579 people and 7500 in 2004 become literate. The NFDE developed the first literacy textbook for adults, entitled “Eye of Wisdom” for this campaign. Contrary to above-mentioned failed cases, this campaign succeeded due to the social development, change of people’s tendency, because people start to understand the value placed on education and that literacy is a starting point for better life.

The summer literacy campaign is intended to be organized each summer, involving 20 percent of the total illiterate population aged above 15. Given the guaranteed success of the campaign, the illiteracy would be eradicated and literacy rate would be brought up to 99 percent by 2008. Nevertheless, the achievement of universal basic literacy attainment doesn’t mean full success since further attention should be paid to the post-literacy programs to enable people to make good use of their knowledge and skills in their daily life. In this connection, a two-year project, entitled “Literacy through Distance Education” is being implemented supported by UNESCO covers 6 selected aimags targeting illiterate and neo-literate population. Within this project, the post-literacy programs, including audio-visual learning materials for neo-literate adults will be developed based on needs assessment to be conducted prior to development and training.

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<sup>22</sup> “Final Report of the “Literate” Project. Ulaanbaatar., 1998

## VI. Language and Gender Issues on Literacy

Since Mongolia use one language, a favorable condition is created to promote literacy. 92.3 percent of the total population of Mongolia are Khalkha Mongols, 4.2 percent are Kazakh people, who is the national minority, from the furthest province Bayan-Ulgii aimag. Although there are more 20 different dialects like Durvud, Bayad, Buriad, people speak same language, use same writing, which make easier to conduct literacy trainings throughout the country. However, for Kazakh housewives, unemployed youth, school drop-outs are of particular attention, though educated Kazakhs are bilingual. Primary schools are running on their mother tongue-Kazakh. School coverage is 3.5 percent lower than state's average in Bayan-Ulgii aimag. Especially further development of textbooks and learning materials in Kazakh language is to be considered. Consequently, the development of bi-literacy programs needs to be taken into account.

Excluded group, including the "Tsaatan", living in the taiga of Khuvsgul aimag is indigenous people like Kazakh, as well as poor people. The education level of the Tsaatans is very low. According to the survey conducted by the National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia in 2003, 14 percent of the survey respondents are illiterates and 37.7 percent of children aged 8-16 living in the taiga dropped-out of school. Since 1997, the number of Tsaatan's school drop-outs has decreased by 10 percent<sup>23</sup>. Tsaatans speak both in Tuva and Mongolian languages. Tsaatan children stay in the taiga until they come to school and they encounter language and communications difficulties in understanding and expressing themselves which discourage them from learning. The government used to train teachers of Tuva language. Only three from prepared five Tuva language teachers work in primary school. Teachers from Tuva State of the Russian Federation used to be invited before 1990 however, this practice is now interrupted.

### Box 2. Advantages and challenges on literacy education in Mongolia

#### Advantages:

- Good literacy environment (elder people are literate, almost one language, except low educated Kazakhs, abundance of literacy teachers etc)
- Illiterate and semi-literate youth and housewives are psychologically prepared and highly motivated to get educated
- Girls and women are more encouraged to go to school than boys

#### Challenges:

- Not clear indicators to define the literacy level
- Absolute number of illiterates is not a small amount for total population
- Big territory with very low and extremely sparsely located nomadic population, it's difficult to keep organizing sustainable literacy activities.
- Unpleasant climatic condition allows organizing the trainings only in summer times.

In 2000, the illiteracy rate amongst 15-19 year olds was 3.2 percent meaning 8.4 thousand. Of this figure, 5.6 thousand are boys and 2.8 thousand are girls. [According to the census of 2000, gender disparity is not large among "illiterate" \(male 2.0 per](#)

<sup>23</sup>Report of National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia. Ulaanbaatar.,2003



cent and female 2.5 per cent) and “*literate and not-educated*” classification group’s adults. It is apparent that males are more educated than females, but the detailed analysis made on the census results revealed that gender and age disparities are becoming larger. For instance: Age of illiterate population is becoming younger. According to the census of 2000, among 15-19 aged youth, the illiteracy rate (3.2 percent) is increased by 2.2 points in 2000 compared to data of 1989 and 34.2 per cent or 11491 of illiterates are youth aged 15-24 (Figure 5). 66.3 per cent of 15-24 aged illiterate youth and 64.9 per cent of “*literate and not-educated*” classification 15-19 aged youth are male.

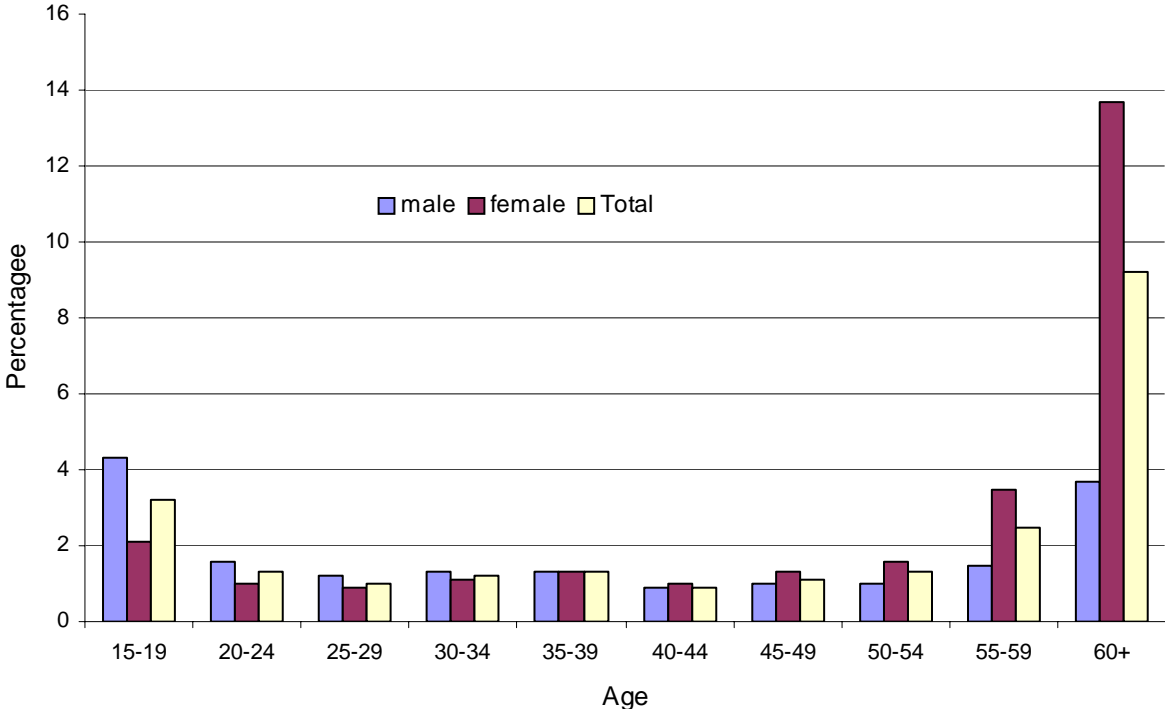


Figure 5. Illiteracy rate by age and sex  
 \*Source: National Statistical Office. (2000). Population and housing census 2000. Ulaanbaatar.

The gender situation in Mongolia in comparison with other Asian countries is quite unique. In 1921, the first literacy school for women was set up with 20 students in UB. By 1931, about 40 percent of children enrolled in primary schools was female, 75 percent by 1969. The gap between male and female literacy rates narrowed from 16 percent in 1963 to below 3 percent in 1989. Since transition, there has been a widening 'reverse gender gap' at all of levels of education.

In 2004, net school coverage rate was 91.6 percent female and 88.5 percent male (Table 6). The ratio of number boys to girls is low at all levels of schooling in

Mongolia, in secondary school 65.5 percent female and 49.1 percent male, for rural boys was 41.6 percent and 58.3 percent for girls (UNDP, 1997). 61.7 percent are boys from total number of out-of-school children aged below 15 and men constitute 59.7 percent of total illiterate adults.

Table 6. Net coverage rate\*

Age group	male	Female
8-11	85.1	87.0
12-15	91.8	95.9
8-15	88.5	91.6

\*Source: Statistical data of MoECS, 2004

The following factors influence this reverse gender imbalance:

- The practice of withdrawing boys (especially, in rural areas) from school to assist in income-earning activities, mainly herding and the collapse of the vocational education system (i.e. male-oriented education).
- Traditionally Mongols encourage more their girls to go to school than boys
- Lack of system to support boy's education and the trend is for males to enter the labor market earlier than girls.

"Policy to support boy's education" was issued by Government of Mongolia from 2004 in order to reduce the reverse gender gap.

## VII. Conclusion

Before transition began, Mongolia had a comprehensive achievement on literacy education throughout the country. The social and economic changes arising from transition created new problems and challenges for education, particularly literacy.

Although the absolute number of illiterate population (34011 illiterates aged above 15, by census 2000) seems to be small, comparing to the whole population it's worth paying a great attention. Adult literacy education still remains a major goal of education system in Mongolia. The relevant teaching methodology and specific literacy learning materials for adult literacy are not developed. It is no more significant to define the literacy level by completion grades due to the poor quality of education. Therefore, new test with new indicators should be developed and the survey must be conducted accordingly to re-assess literacy levels of population.

In order to promote literacy, it's important not only to educate the illiterates, but also to prevent the re-appearance of illiteracy by reducing drop-out rate and by increasing the primary school enrollment rate to achieve universal primary education, as well as the links and synergies need to be strengthened between formal and non-formal education.

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