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Addressing Air Pollution Through Inclusion-Sensitivity: A Case Study

(Courtesy of Delgerzul Lodoysamba, Faculty of Public Health, Mongolian National University of Medical Science)

According to the World Health Organization, air pollution is responsible for about 7 million premature deaths annually, with the vast majority occurring in low-and middle-income countries. More than 3 billion people worldwide rely on polluting energy sources such as wood, dung and charcoal for cooking. The situation in Mongolia's capital, Ulaanbaatar (UB), is no exception, where levels of particulate matter in the air have risen to almost 80 times the recommended safety level set by the World Health Organization. (An article in Bloomberg News notes that on December 16,

2016, the level of PM2.5, or fine particulate matter, in the air as measured hourly peaked at 1,985 micrograms a cubic meter on Dec. 16 in the capital's Bayankhoshuu district, according to data posted by government website agaar.mn. The daily average settled at 1,071 micrograms that day. The World Health Organization recommends PM2.5 exposure of no more than 25 micrograms over 24 hours.) While the causes of air pollution in UB include smoke from power plants, dust in the desert, unpaved roads and open soil surfaces, ash and emissions from coal stoves, boilers and vehicles, a major contributor is the raw coal and wood burned for heating *gers* (tents that serve as homes on the steppes) to survive Mongolia's harsh winters and cooking (one fifth of households cook with coal). The health impact of this is horrible. A 2013 study by Canada's Simon Fraser University concluded that 10 percent of deaths in Ulaanbaatar were related to complications from air pollution.

I was one of 30 young Mongolian professionals with the USAID-funded Leaders Advancing Democracy (LEAD)-Mongolia who visited the U.S. in January 2017 for a series of meetings, discussions and other events in Washington, DC, and at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA, to explore issues of poverty alleviation, environmental protection, and transparency and anti-corruption. The team of LEAD participants that I am working with is determined to raise awareness about air pollution among citizens and

decision makers. While we all were in the USA, far from Mongolia, we participated in air pollution protests happening in UB. Each of us wrote one message which was recorded and posted to social media. Our messages reached 100,000 people through the Internet.

As part of our LEAD experience, we've been supported to think carefully about social inclusion and how different groups, especially vulnerable groups, experience environmental issues differently. We reflected on this last year in our *Democratic Foundations Workshop* and again during a TAAP workshop in DC. This gets us thinking: air pollution doesn't impact all people the same in Ulaanbaatar. In fact, all evidence suggests that women and children are the most vulnerable and most severely impacted by this crisis.

We want to educate citizens about the impacts of air pollution, what action is being taken, what still needs to be done and how we can all work together to make Ulaanbaatar an environmentally friendly city. We will need to understand how different kinds of people in UB are effected differently. The World Health Organization's report, Burning Opportunity[1], notes that the people who are most vulnerable to air pollution in UB are pregnant women and children under 5 living in the ger district. For them, pneumonia is the most common immediate problem, and long-term exposure can contribute to cardiovascular disease and lung cancer. Women inhale thick

smoke for hours on end as they prepare meals for their families and tend to spend the most time working to keep the home warm. Children, the elderly and other vulnerable people also suffer disproportionately because, like women, they spend more time in the home than men. In 2012, more than 60% of all premature deaths from household air pollution were among women and children. All of this information is important for us to know so that we can build alliances with other efforts (such as the UB Clean Air Project, the World Bank and civil society organizations that work on issues facing women and girls, older persons, people from the *ger* districts) so that we and policymakers can understand who has access to information and financing to consider purchasing electric heaters and higher quality stoves and who has access to health care to treat the health burdens of unclean energy use.

So what do we do next? We will need data on what messages work to promote clean and safe household energy. We will need to think about who our messages are intended for and how we want people to act against air pollution. And we will need to think carefully about our approach to inclusion to make sure that women and children are included, consulted, and positively impacted by our work. We are excited about this project and will write again to the readers of the TAAP Tuesday newsletter and tell you how it goes!
Photo: Bayarmaa Sukhbaatar from Zavkhan aimag. Courtesy of Delgerzul Lodoysamba,

Insights from the Gender Digital Divide

(Courtesy of Sheila Scott, Center for Applied Learning and Impact, IREX)

In March IREX will publish a political economy analysis (PEA) of the **gender digital divide in Myanmar**, a country undergoing a technological revolution concurrent with systemic political and economic change. The research builds upon insights from IREX's Beyond Access program, which works with government, private sector and local CSO partners to transform libraries into modern community centers offering a range of 21st century services. When program data revealed that fewer females were taking advantage of libraries' internet-enabled tablets and digital skills training, despite surveys showing 28% fewer women than men own mobile phones (the most popular digital device in Myanmar), the team recognized an inclusivity issue that is part of a well-documented global trend.

Worldwide 3.9 billion people lack access to the internet, despite the fact that 95% of the global population now live in an area covered by a basic 2G mobile-cellular network. The gap in access to the internet, together with interrelated disparities in digital skills, usage patterns and both real and perceived benefits of ICTs, is known as the **digital divide**. As information and communication technologies (ICTs) increasingly mediate both participation in and benefits of development processes, those who lack ICT access, skills and benefits - disproportionately female, rural, low income, illiterate, and elderly - risk increased marginalization. (Note: there is not much country-specific data on the extent to which the digital divide affects persons with disabilities.)

The **global gender digital divide** is the measurable gap between men and women in ICT access, skills and benefits, as both consumers and producers of digital information, products and services. More females than males - an estimated 200 million more worldwide - are offline. In 2013 Intel estimated that closing the gender digital divide would boost global GDP by **$4-5 billion**. Yet the gap continues to expand worldwide, making it imperative to improve understanding of how ICTs are becoming yet another obstacle, enforced through policies, practices and norms, that limits women's and girls' agency and voice in arenas from civic participation and governance to education and economic opportunities.

The gender digital divide is one of many **challenges facing Myanmar**. Emerging from five decades of military rule, civil war and international isolation, Myanmar will benefit from leveraging the potential of its diverse population and minimizing systemic barriers that limit the ability of certain social groups – particularly the 70% rural majority, the sizable female demographic majority, and the dozens of ethnolinguisitc minorities - to participate in and benefit from development. IREX's research examines one such systemic impediment - the gender digital divide.

A sneak peek at some Key Findings:.

- Although widely *perceived to be normative and personal choices* by women and girls, manifestations of the gender digital divide in Myanmar

are systemic and detrimental to women's and girls' full participation in and ability to benefit from development processes.

- *gender-based control over ICT devices and skills acquisition* is more salient to the gender digital divide in Myanmar than issues of access, which tend to fall along age, rural/urban and ethnolinguistic lines rather than gender.
- there is *more political will to accelerate integration of ICTs* than for gender equality as a priority.

Additional resources:
http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/123481461249337484/WDR16-BP-Bridging-the-Disability-Divide-through-Digital-Technology-RAJA.pdf //
http://g3ict.com/resource_center/G3ict_Publications

For more information, please contact Sheila Scott, Center for Applied Learning and Impact, IREX: sscott@irex.org
Photo Courtesy of Sheila Scott, IREX.

Tune in! Social Inclusion Webinar Series: Digital Divides and Dividends: Productivity, Inequality and Liberty in the Digital Age (February 28, 11:00AM - 12:00PM EST)

From the announcement: "Digital technologies have rapidly spread in much of the world. The number of internet users has more than tripled in a decade, and nearly 70 percent of the bottom fifth of the population in developing countries own a mobile phone. Despite this positive increase, digital divides remain in many countries: 60 percent of the world's population is still off-line and therefore can't fully participate in the digital economy, while many advanced economies are facing rising inequality and increasingly polarized labor markets due to the expanding automation. The World Development Report (WDR) 2016: Digital Dividends explores the impact of digital technologies on economic development, showing how these can promote inclusion, efficiency and innovation. It describes potential gains from new technologies but also issues related to digital dividends, risks, and policies that can help mitigate negative impacts.

This webinar will feature a presentation by Deepak Mishra, Co-Director of the WDR 2016: Digital Dividends, who will talk about inequality and exclusion in access to digital technology, and the potential role of technology as a mechanism to promote social inclusion. The speaker will discuss how digital divides can be addressed to foster growth, job creation and better services, as well as reduce inequality and exclusion."
Photo Courtesy of World Learning Algeria, 2017.

Got Inclusion?

We want to hear from you! Please share your inclusion activities, success stories, upcoming events, and intriguing resources. Send to TAAP@worldlearning.org. New to TAAP? Read past newsletters and learn more by clicking here.