Making Transparency Inclusive in Mongolia

“Without inviting different groups of society [to help solve a problem] we miss out on certain [points of view],” says Bilguun Batjargal, an Ulaanbaatar-based lawyer. “Yes, you can avoid
exclusion. Yes, you can avoid being discriminatory. But it’s not enough. To be truly inclusive, all communities need to be brought into conversations about corruption and transparency.

Batjargal and a group of 10 other emerging anti-corruption leaders are working with World Learning’s Leaders Advancing Democracy program (LEAD Mongolia) on a transparency project that employs these principles of social inclusion. The Transparent and Accountable School project aims to rebuild trust between the schools and community of Ulaanbaatar’s Nalaikh District, an underserved area on the outskirts of the capital.

Trust is sorely lacking in that relationship. Nominchimeg Davaanyam, an education specialist and NGO leader working on the Transparent and Accountable School project, says administrators discourage parents from getting involved in school budgeting and planning issues. Teachers and students, too, are shut out. Davaanyam argues this only allows corruption to flourish, which she worries will erode trust in Mongolia’s democratic transition and discourage the next generation. “If young people start accepting [corruption] as a norm, then we are doomed,” she says. “They need to be educated on topics related to anti-corruption and transparency.”

The project team wants to address this dearth of transparency by providing a platform for teachers, parents, and students to get involved and to realize they have the power to do something about corruption. The intent is to build transparency and trust through public participation in school planning, budgeting, and other processes. Through a series of trainings, the team is helping the community create their own transparency plan for the school.

Selection of the Nalaikh District was an intentional act of inclusion. The area has a sizable Kazakh community—the largest ethnic minority in Mongolia. The project group crafted a design to include the Kazakh community, ensuring Kazakh language interpreters were present at all activities and translating content into both Kazakh and Mongolian languages.

But the transparency project takes inclusion even further than that: Instead of simply bringing the obvious stakeholders—like parents and teachers—into the conversation, the Transparent and Accountable School project is engaging everyone from students to school janitors. “We wanted to include all layers of the school community, not just the school administrators, but also the people who clean the school,” Davaanyam says. The team argued that if certain groups aren’t included, there’s a greater risk for corruption.

“A year ago, I wouldn’t have considered that inclusion would play a big role in transparency or anti-corruption. I thought of it as just trying to raise awareness on the issue of corruption itself and that’s it,” Davaanyam says. “[The workshop] really allowed me to think differently about how we exclude or include different groups of people.”

In turn, the Transparent and Accountable School project has encouraged members of the Nalaikh community to think differently about how they can contribute to the school. As a community-owned model of democracy, the program demonstrated that all voices matter and should be included in discussions about the school’s future. “It opened the horizons of everyone involved,” Davaanyam says.
Batjargal agrees. He recalls the moment when the Nalaikh school cleaner, who took part in all the team’s trainings, delivered a speech at their project closing event. This level of involvement—from school principal to school cleaner—is uncommon in Mongolia. “She felt empowered,” he says. “She realized she can do more than just do her job. She can be part of the process and have a voice in the process. She can be part of so much more.”

That is truly social inclusion in action.

*Photo: Students collaborating on ideas to cultivate transparency in their school district.*

---

**Gender Identity and Language in a Non-Binary World**

Behind each language, there is a culture with well-defined social norms relating to identities, especially genders. In most cultures, gender is perceived as male or female which leaves us with little or no room for non-binary gender expression. Adopting non-binary gender translation into our existing languages can be a challenge, but there are high hopes that this is not impossible, as there is a growing awareness and acceptance of non-binary gender identities among younger generations and human rights organizations.

Recently, *K International’s* article “Translating Gender Identity in a Non-Binary World” and *How We Get To Next’s* article, “Translating Identity Across the Language Barrier,” examined the issue of gender identity in relation to today’s spoken languages and especially in a traditionally regimental binary world. For many of our friends, colleagues, and family members, having non-binary gender identity alone can be very stressful but is even more frustrating when their language consists of inflexible binary nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, and interjections. *How We Get To Next’s* article pointed out that “while language can offer relief, it can also add layers of complication. In Arabic, it can be harder to get around the gender binary, because sometimes verbs carry feminine or masculine forms.”
Because of many sensitivity issues surrounding gender, translating it from one context or language to another can carry misperception and resistance. It is argued in K International’s article that “gender identity translation can be difficult based on more than just a lack of appropriate words in the target language. There are also issues around social and cultural acceptance of the matters being discussed. Just because a word exists, doesn’t mean that it should be used – some terms that are linguistically correct in terms of non-binary gender translation may be deemed offensive or unacceptable from a social perspective.”

In the last 10 years, the gender neutrality movement has slowly gained traction in some parts of the world. As a result, we are gradually seeing some people and institutions embracing and incorporating non-binary terms such as they, theirs, and them in daily interactions and operations. Current binary definitions of gender, though inherent to our linguistic culture, ought to be replaced with non-binary-inclusive definitions that use appropriate pronouns. As the K International’s article posed it, “after all, why should a group of 19 women and one man be referred to as ‘them’ in the masculine form?”

The prospects of a non-binary gender-neutral society is brighter than what most skeptics would argue. As lawmakers pass gender-neutral laws such as President Obama administration’s guidelines on transgender bathrooms, non-binary characters are shown playing key roles on TV shows. As a result, people are developing and understanding, acceptance, and tolerance of non-binary gender identity terms. As also stressed in K International’s article, “this process of linguistic appreciation is often one that spreads from culture to culture as the issues remain in the media spotlight. This should help to spread an understanding of non-binary gender identity terms, which will in turn help those battling with the challenges associated with translating such terms.”

Sensitivity to non-binary gender and other traditionally marginalized identities are crucial to the success of any inclusion-sensitive program. As Randal Mason, International Development Consultant & Inclusion Strategist, puts it, “the terminology surrounding gender identity is complex and rapidly evolving. And when working with different languages and cultural concepts around how gender is conceived, what we attempt to convey can become literally ‘lost in translation.’ As development professionals, it’s important for us to be aware of and challenge our assumptions. We have a lot to learn from other cultures about how genders are perceived and acknowledged.”

The TAAP Toolkit intentionally and actively promotes a practice of self-inquiry and reflection that generates understanding of implementers’ own biases and how it could help positively shape their behavior to deliver more effective, inclusive, and unbiased programs and projects.

TAAP’ing Political Economy Analysis

On July 25th more than 20 development practitioners from ACDI/VOCA, IREX, World Learning, the Urban Institute and USAID convened at World Learning to discuss the TAAP Inclusion Analysis and the Political Economy Analysis (PEA) frameworks. The group explored the overlaps and gaps of the two frameworks, and how they can enrich each other, particularly as the TAAP team finalizes the analytical components of the TAAP Inclusion Toolkit.

USAID defines PEA as “a field-research methodology used by donors to explore not simply how things happen in an aid-recipient country but why.” PEA analysts seek windows of opportunity to strengthen development work and outcomes. USAID’s PEA lead Sarah Swift noted that “PEA requires practitioners to take a neutral perspective and avoids assuming the intentions of actors. In the words of Walt Whitman, “be curious, not judgmental.” PEA also identifies champions and spoilers in order to see how they can build on the system already put into place. First PEA considers the foundational factors, the likelihood of changing the system and length of time that would take, and then the rules of the game, the formal and informal rules regarding a particular issue. PEA asks: Who are the main players? Who is influencing them? What are their motivations? What do they have to gain? What do they have to lose? How can they be incentivized? The TAAP Inclusion Analysis framework also seeks windows of opportunity to “inclusivize” development programs through gathering and analyzing data on "boosters" (what is already going right with
regard to inclusion in a context that can be build upon) and barriers. A TAAP analysis draws on the voices, skills and experiences of marginalized and excluded groups with an appreciation of their role as critical change-makers in society.

Swathi Balasubramanian, technical advisor with IREX’s Center for Applied Learning and Impact, noted that PEA analyses could benefit from an inclusion lens because "ultimately, in a development context, it is about making sure we are responding to the needs of not just one group but all groups." By applying an inclusion lens to PEA, it can reach more stakeholders, get more buy in, and increase the impact. PEA can, and should, work towards finding a way to have a sustained impact by incorporating inclusion. TAAP’s methodology of doing self-reflection activities could also benefit PEA. Along with self-reflection, identifying your own biases is a concept that TAAP addresses that PEA could adopt. It is important to consider how the implementing organization itself is a big player in the politics of the situation, since we carry the politics, incentives, and power structures with us in this work.

A PEA analysis helps practitioners to think and work politically to examine situations at the systems level, in order to see how it can be influenced or worked around. This is one aspect of PEA that is now being incorporated into the TAAP approach. At the workshop another point made by PEA experts was that the impact of sustainability is often about ownership. For people to buy into the idea of inclusion, they must realize how it makes their lives better. Once they see the benefits, they will be motivated to find ways to make it happen. PEA's power dynamics assessment could add value to TAAP because it allows for an examination of which players in the excluded and included groups are most important to target. Putting these two frameworks together creates a more holistic approach to development.

These frameworks are not prescriptive and can be tailored to any context. They illustrate possibilities for "doing development differently": moving away from the role of development practitioners as those who have solutions, and instead becoming facilitators so that development solutions are driven, tested, and adapted by the people who live in these contexts.

Photo: Workshop attendees discussing the overlaps of PEA and the TAAP approach.

This Week’s TAAP Staff Picks:
1- #BetterThanThis is a campaign for women’s political participation. The Better Than This initiative recently put out a thought provoking video that depicts Kenyan women candidates with sexist quotes that have actually been said to them. The video is an example of good programming and efforts to change social norms through social media. This depiction of powerful women with such vulgar language shows the prevalence of sexism and prejudice still in society today. We look forward to living in a world where women can run for office without facing discrimination!

2- AbleThrive is an online platform created by Brittany Déjean, a 2006 SIT alum, to connect people with disabilities and their families to disability resources such as curated articles, videos, products. By equipping families with the resources they need to fulfill their potential and engage in society, AbleThrive builds the foundation of an inclusive society. AbleThrive also challenges the negative rhetoric of disability by showing what's possible; their ongoing #ThisIsHowI Challenge campaign brings visibility to life with a disability and showcases their abilities.

*Photo: Courtesy of the Better Than This initiative*

---

**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](#).

Click [here](#) to subscribe to the TAAP Tuesday Newsletter.