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THE MONGOLIAN DROP OUT STUDY

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Executive Summary

This research project investigates the drop out rate in Mongolia and the reasons behind its occurrence. It situates the drop out incidence along the current policies and legislation of Mongolia on drop out vis-à-vis its compulsory education program. The report indicates that there is no nationwide legislative enactment on drop out per se, and although there are initiatives to alleviate the drop out problem, they are at best palliative and do not bear any legal weight, since they are not legal enactments in the first place, and do not impose sanctions for non-compliance. This, as a matter of course, renders Mongolia's compulsory education program ineffective and contentious.

The report is divided into the following:

Introduction and Framework – discusses the drop out project background and rationale, the legislative policies as regards the educational system of Mongolia and the educational structure of Mongolia. It also presents a review of literature, which analyzes relevant studies on the drop out issue in Mongolia and underscores the implications of the “the politics of statistics on the issue of school drop out” (Steiner-Khamsi, Stolpe and Amgaabazar, 2004. p.85). It also covers a description of the project goals and objectives, the hypotheses used, and the methodology employed.

Design of the Study – discusses the design of the study including the kind of sampling used, the sampling population and the instruments used in the study. A combination of stratified and random sampling was used and a combination of questionnaires, interviews and focus group discussions were employed as instruments.

Implementation of the Study – discusses how the study was implemented, how data was collected, triangulated and subjected to quality control.

Findings and Analysis – provides a list of findings from the study and a synthesis of the qualitative and quantitative analyses of the drop out status in Mongolia, the methodology on how drop outs are counted by different government units and agencies, the reasons on why children drop out and the legislations and policies on drop out. As noted, there is no official definition of drop out prior to the enactment of the Education Law of 2002, which was implemented in January 2005. As well, there are no established standard means of counting the drop outs, thus the variances in the figures and the impossibility of reconciling them – a serious flaw that seriously puts to question the official government claim that the drop out rate is decreasing.

This section also presents and discusses the reasons behind the drop out issue as borne from the data collected from the field, from the questionnaires, the interviews and focus group discussions. The drop out reasons are categorized into two: those that belong under policy focus areas and the understudied ones. Under policy focus areas are: poverty/ low income or lack of means of subsistence; child labor related reasons such as herding, needs to earn a living to help support the family and need to take care of siblings or older members of the family; migration, lack of dormitories, teacher discrimination and systemic problems with the educational system of Mongolia.

The understudied areas: are physical and/or mental disabilities, lack of communication and socialization skills, bullying or peer discrimination; and educational level of parents.

As previously discussed, there is no national legislative enactment regarding the drop out problem, and the initiatives to address the issue are considered palliative since they do not carry legal weight and do not provide sanctions against those who, in one way or the other, cause or made cause the dropping out of a child. Hence, Mongolia's compulsory education is compromised.

Discussion and Conclusion – discusses the drop out issue and the reasons behind its occurrence within the framework of the study. As well, the implications of the drop out problem are contextualized within the broader perspective of the Mongolian society, in general, and its educational system, in particular. Attention is called to the reasons behind the drop out issue specifically, to the understudied reason of physical and mental disabilities. It must be noted that it is only in the cities and aimag (provincial) centers where there are provisions for those who are physically and mentally challenged. Outside of these areas, no such provisions exist and neither are physically and mentally challenged individuals registered or counted in the official registries. The impact of this, as well as the other reasons classified as understudied areas, on the overall drop out problem in Mongolia are areas suggested to be explored, while the impact of the policy focus ones, in particular the systemic problems within the Mongolian educational system, are recommended to be immediately attended to as a matter of policy review and reform.

Recommendations and Indicators– an enumeration of policy recommendations, including, but not limited, to: need to conduct a nationwide information and awareness campaign on the drop out issue and its negative impact on Mongolian society, but more importantly, on the Mongolian drop out child, not as a statistic, but, as a victim of forces and circumstances s/he has no control of; the need to adopt a national definition of who a drop out is; the need to establish standards and procedures

including a check and balance system and a cross-referencing mechanism to accurately, as much as possible, count and monitor the incidence of drop out; the need to address the systemic problems plaguing the Mongolian educational system, in particular, teacher discrimination; the need to enact a national policy on drop out separate and distinct from poverty alleviation measures; and the need to establish oversight committees to track and oversee the drop out problem in the soums, aimags and cities, including the capital city of Ulaanbaatar.

Under this section, drop out indicators are also suggested: income/poverty level; prolonged unexcused absences; transfer within the aimag or transfer to other aimag, city; big family (4 or more children with 1 or 2 children who already dropped out); working after school; and high rate of truancy

Limitations of the Study – discusses the limitations of the study in terms of the research capacity of some team members and the inherent flaws on some of the questionnaires such as, the question to parents asking whether the dropped out child is living with the parent or not, and some of the multiple choice answers were: parents deceased, without parents. The fact that the parent was right there answering the questionnaire totally negates the choices and, for that matter, the question itself. Another was a question to the teacher respondents on what they think is the reason behind the lack of parental attention and one of the choices was lack of parental attention, answering the question with the question itself. Moreover, the question already assumed that there is, in fact, lack of parental attention.

For the most part, the questions that posed problems not only when they were asked but, more importantly, in interpreting how they relate to the incidence of the drop out in Mongolia, were the ones that attempted to draw a psychological profile of the child, which were retained from the Albanian instruments, such as, “do you smoke?”, “do you feel upset sometimes?”, “do you have nightmares?”, “do you have headaches?”, and from the Mongolian side, “does anyone in your family drink vodka a lot?”

The questions assumed that engagement in such activities lead one to drop out which, as is obvious is not the case. It does not even have to be pointed out that everybody has headaches, nightmares or feel upset sometimes, regardless if one is a drop out or not; or, if somebody in the family drinks vodka, that this is tantamount to alcoholism. As well, not one from the team had the psychological or clinical preparation to be able to draw any inference, much less conclusion, on the materiality of such

questions on the drop out issue. Although these questions were not made part of the analysis, they stand to prove some inherent flaws both on the Albanian and Mongolian questionnaires

Further, the language issue behind the scant quantitative analysis and the possible “lost in translation” from Mongolian to literal English of the field reports; it must be noted that the Mongolian team members have limited English proficiency and the Research Associate tasked to edit and to write the final report does not speak Mongolian.

List of Acronyms/Abbreviations

EFA	Education for All
IBE	International Board of Education
IPRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper
NFE	Non- Formal Education
NFED	Non-Formal Educational Development
NFEDC	Non-Formal Education and Distance Education Center
NHRSC	National Human Rights Commission
NSO	National Statistical Office
MEA	Mongolian Educational Alliance
MOECS	Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
MOSTEC	Ministry of Science, Technology, Education and Culture
OSIESP	Open Society Institute Educational Support Program
RSDP	Rural Schools Development Program
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
UB	Ulaanbaatar
UNDP	United National Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund

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1. Introduction and Framework

1.1. Project Description and Rationale

The drop out rate is of particular concern to Mongolia since it is a country of young people: almost 35% of its population is under 18 and a quarter of the population is between 10 and 19 years old. Its efforts towards socio-economic transformation - a market led policy reform since the end of Russian domination in 1990, has resulted in a host of social ailments, which Mongolia has never experienced before either in terms of magnitude and scale. These include deepening poverty, increasing unemployment exacerbated by a colossal debt -servicing that led to problems in its education system, such as poor school conditions, poor quality of teaching and learning especially in rural schools and inadequate recreational activities for youth outside school and the increase in its school drop-out rates (UNICEF, 2004).

The need to analyze the incidence of drop out rate against the larger sphere of Mongolia's educational policies therefore cannot be over-emphasized. Such analysis is hoped to spearhead the formulation and adoption of more salient policy recommendations that would arrest, if not ultimately, eliminate the growing problem of drop-outs in Mongolia. To this end, this study is conducted not only to monitor the drop out rate in Mongolia but, more importantly, to find out the reasons behind its occurrence. The results of the study are meant to influence educational policy makers and officials in Mongolia to look at the root causes of the drop-out problem with the hope that they will develop reliable, holistic and sustainable programs, strategies or initiatives that would eventually solve the drop-out problem in Mongolia.

As well, the results are to be shared with the international educational policy studies community who is conducting a comparative analysis of the drop out incidence in various countries. This survey is thus a part of the international study on drop out rates by the Open Society Institute Education Support Program and is locally conducted in Mongolia under the auspices of the Mongolian Educational Alliance (MEA). MEA is a spin-off of the Soros Foundation in Mongolia and is a registered non-government organization committed to introduce educational reform initiatives informed by the values of open society.

Through sharing and collaboration, participants of the study are expected to learn from each other's experiences with the end view of formulating policy recommendations that would alleviate the drop out rate in the participating countries.

1.2. Legislation, Regulations and Structures

The Mongolian Law on Education (2002) mandates that every Mongolian regardless of 'ethnicity, language, race, gender, socio-economic status, wealth, employment, position, religion and personal values' has a right to receive education in his/her native language (article 5.1.4) and must attend basic education (article 6.3) provided by the state free of charge as required by the Constitution of Mongolia (article 6.2).¹

Since Mongolia chose the democratic and market-oriented system in 1990, one of its most important tasks has been the development of a new legal basis for education. To achieve this goal, several new legal acts, such as the State Education Policy, the Education Law, the Higher Education Law and the Primary and Secondary Education Law were adopted by the Parliament in 1995. These laws defined policies of democracy and openness in educational administrative structures; decentralized the administration and financing of all public schools; transferred the management of schools to local governments in the aimags (provinces); increased the autonomy of colleges and universities; and enabled the establishment of private educational institutions.

The State Education Policy defines education as a priority sector of the society, as well as an important source of rapid growth of scientific, technical, economic and social development. In addition, for the first time the importance of non-formal continuing education for all is recognized.

According to current legislation, compulsory schooling covers primary and lower secondary education (nine years of study for pupils aged 8-16). Education is free of charge at the upper (general) secondary level (Grades 9 and 10).

1.3. Administration and Management of the Education System²

The central education authority in Mongolia is the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (MOECS). The function of MOECS is defined by law as the promotion and dissemination of education, science and culture.

Nearly all publicly financed education is subordinate to or under the supervision of the Ministry. The

¹Source: Amgaabazar, Gerelmaa (2005). World Bank Draft Policy Brief on the Mongolian Drop Out Rate (unpublished)

² Source: The International Bureau of Education. UNESCO. (March, 2003). Country Dosiers: Mongolia

administrative fields of the Ministry include not only pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational and higher education and educational research, but also cultural and scientific affairs and non-formal education as well.

In accordance with the Education Law, the main functions of MOECS are:

- to organize and ensure nationwide implementation of legal mandates for education
- to develop a comprehensive and suitable system of education for all, including non-formal education;
- to co-ordinate the activities of those organizations offering various training programs and providing professional help;
- to organize and provide in-service training for all educational personnel, putting forward the issues related to social benefits for teachers.

The Ministry provides guidance and advice for the operation of local public and private educational institutions, as well as financial assistance. It defines policies with regard to education, science and culture and it is responsible for the implementation of these policies. In addition, MOECS publishes and approves textbooks and curricula and provides support for the supervision of local educational centers and national universities.

The Ministry is headed by the Minister who is a member of the Prime Minister's Cabinet. He is assisted by the Deputy Minister and the State Secretary. The Ministry is divided into four main departments, which are the main providers of policy and planning guidelines and public administration and civil service management, namely: the Department of Policy Development and Strategic Planning; the Department of Public Administration Management; the Department of Performance Co-ordination of Policy Development and Planning; and the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation.

In Mongolia there are 21 aimags (provincial centers), each of them further divided into a number of soums (rural districts). In every aimag there is an Aimag Education and Culture Department within the local government, which serves as the local educational authority. These Departments are responsible for the administration and management of government services relating to formal and non-formal education.

The provincial governments are responsible for:

- coordinating activities in implementing the nationwide education policy at the aimag and soum levels;
- administering, managing and establishing kindergartens and general secondary schools
- appointing or discharging school principals
- approving budgets for schools and kindergartens

- organizing actions for providing compulsory basic education for all children;

For example, a university can directly consult with the MOECS regarding its own budget, and can secure its own fund sources out of: revenue from tuition fees; research grants from public organizations and business; and technical assistance from international organizations.

1.4. Organization of the Education System

The structure of the education system in Mongolia includes pre-school education (kindergarten) and general secondary schools (primary, lower and upper secondary). Schools for the primary, lower and upper secondary levels generally do not exist separately. Virtually all schools have at least eight grades, while schools up to Grade 10 are mainly found in the larger towns and cities. However, in the countryside there are a few separate 1-4 grade schools in baghs, some of the independent schools while some are branches of soum schools.

1.5 Structure of the Education System in Mongolia

1.5.1. Pre-School Education

Pre-school education (kindergarten) is not compulsory and caters to children aged 3-7.

1.5.2. Primary Education³

Primary education covers a period of four years for pupils aged 8-12 and is compulsory. There are only 79 independent primary schools, which are mainly found in remote soums, and 232 independent schools with classes for eight years, consisting of primary and lower secondary schools. At the end of primary education, pupils sit the common public examination. No credentials are granted at the end of the primary school.

1.5.3. Secondary Education

Lower secondary education is the final stage of compulsory schooling and lasts four years (age group 12-16, grades 6-9), when the diploma of non-complete secondary education is granted. This is followed by two years of upper secondary education when a diploma of complete secondary education is granted. High school consists of grades 10 and 11 for 17 and 18 year old age cohorts. High school

³ Due to the transition to 11-years school system started this year, kindergartens, along with primary schools, offer primary school grade 1 curriculum to 7-year-old children this year only. Students who received primary school grade 1 education in kindergartens this year will be promoted to the grade 2 of the primary school next school year (September 2005- July 2006). This is a temporary measure designed to allow schools one-year preparation time for receiving children as young as 7 years old as well as to compensate for the shortage of classrooms and teachers for the new age cohort currently available in regular schools. Starting the next school year (September 2005) school will resume full responsibility to primary school grades 1 through 5 (Amgaabazar, 2005, op.cit.)

is not compulsory; however, it is a prerequisite for college admission. Graduates from Grades 9 and 10 can join technical and vocational training schools.

Primary and lower secondary education together comprises *basic education level* which is compulsory. A combination of basic education and high school is termed as the general education (Law on Education, 2002 cited by Amgaabazaar, 2005).

Graduates from universities and other higher educational institutions can obtain a diploma, a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. Pre-doctoral and doctoral degree courses are also offered. The duration of studies varies between two and seven years. The school year consists of thirty-four working weeks at the primary level, thirty-five weeks at the lower secondary, and thirty-six weeks at the upper secondary level.

Drop out increased dramatically in the first years of transition and has decreased recently. The changing primary education structure may have affected drop out's figures. The primary school was changed into 6+2+2 model in 1990. In 1992-1993 academic year the education structure was changed again to the former 3+5+2 structure and the percentage of primary school drop outs in 1992-1993 academic year covered only pupils of 1-3rd grade. The indexes from 1993 to 1998 have covered pupils of 1-4th grade according to the present 4+4+2 structure. The attempts to change the school structure affected the school activities and influenced the quality of teaching negatively.

1.6 Alternative Pathways to Education

In cooperation with UNESCO, the government established the Non-Formal Educational Development (NFED) in 1977-2004. The NFED or, NFE as it is commonly called, is composed of two programs: the first program developed and launched in 1997 was "The National Program of Non-Formal Education Development." The second national program called "National Program for Distance Education (DE)", was developed in January, 2002.

1.6.1 The National Program of Non-Formal Education Development⁴

The aim of non-formal education is to give a wide variety of opportunities to people to acquire required knowledge and skills by forms and ways of training appropriate for them. This will deliberately make a tremendous contribution to the process of upgrading their education level on a continuous basis.

⁴ Source: Excerpted from the Enclosure to the Government Resolution No 116, 1997, National Program for Non-Formal Education.

Statistics show that currently in Mongolia more than 100,000 out of 1,200,000 people of adult age are involved in some forms of formal education. And for the rest, there is a lack of well-thought, planned policy or education system, which will provide the knowledge and skills necessary for them to live in a new social environment, satisfy their needs, and raise their education level.

Thus, the program aims to establish a non-formal education system in Mongolia with particular regard to identification of the content, form and methodology of non-formal training concordant to the population's needs and interests, to train the teaching staff, and create a favorable learning and teaching environment in the field.

Towards this end, the program is guided by the following principles of implementation:

- Organize all implementation activities within the government policy in education and appropriate articles stated in the package law
- Ensure even and active participation of governmental and non-governmental, organizations, and the public in the implementation of the program, and coordinate their activities
- Coordinate the program implementation with the UNESCO education development policy for Asian and Pacific region, closely cooperate with related UN branch organizations in the field
- Organize the implementation activities consistent with education level, personal interests and needs of the population
- While implementing the program take into consideration existing experiences and methods of formal education

The program aims to achieve the said principles through these program directions:

- Upgrade the literacy rate of the population
- Upgrade the general education level of the population
- Compensate for the missing knowledge and skills of the population
- Raise professional knowledge and skills of the population through profession acquiring and/or vocational skills improving training programs
- Assist the population to develop their creativity
- Offer self-study or self-development programs to the population

The content of the non-formal education will be developed by the Center for Non-formal Education in cooperation with relevant field-related research organizations by the request of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. It will be monitored and approved by the professional commission.

Aimags and Ulaanbaatar Education Centers will be responsible to develop the content of the non-formal education reflecting features and characteristics of local places, and its implementation will be done by sum and district governments. The implementation process will be monitored and evaluated by the National Education Inspection Service and by its experts.

The methodology of training programs will be developed by the Center for Non-formal Education in cooperation with related Ministries and state agencies. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture will be responsible for developing handouts, guidance, and other learning aid materials and purchasing them to city and aimag Education Centers.

The training of teaching staff for non-formal education and their continuous development will be organized in the following ways:

- by the request of the related ministries, state agencies, city and aimag governments the Center for non-formal education will take a responsibility for long and short-term teaching staff training
- capacity building of the staff of education centers, introduce a well-thought policy to train non-formal education methodologists, organize various in-service training courses for them
- re-train the graduates of vocational schools and institutions to acquire the second qualification in non-formal education
- establish contacts and cooperation with the field-related international organizations to study their experiences and practicalities, involve non-formal education staff in in-service training programs abroad
- introduce the non-formal education methodology into pre-service and in-service teacher education programs of teacher training institutions
- The main form of non-formal education is a distance training

The establishment of a nationwide network for non-formal education will address the following issues:

- Conduct a national research on needs for non-formal education and based on that provide for the population with an access to IT and organize appropriate distance trainings in the field.

- Conduct a detailed research at sum, aimag and city levels to identify their needs, establish non-formal education local sub-branches (so-called “enlightenment centers”).
- Development of teaching and learning printed materials accompanied by necessary audio- and video supplementary aids will be the responsibility of the Center for Non-formal Education.

The MOECS will be responsible for overall management of the program. The Center for Non-formal Education will organize trainings, coordinate all activities held in the field, and provide with appropriate methodology. In local places city and aimag governor’s offices and education centers take responsibility for the implementation of the program. Governors will be responsible for overall coordination and management of programs. In sums and districts programs will be administered by sum and district governors with active involvement of the schools. The qualitative assessment/evaluation of the organization of non-formal education programs, their content, and methodology will be done in the form of small-scale projects by the Center for Non-formal education. The results and outcomes of the evaluation should be processed and reflected/ considered in further development.

To ensure active participation of non-governmental organizations and the public in the non-formal education program the MOECS will organize the following activities:

- Give support and encourage initiatives of educational institutions, the public and individuals concerning the non-formal education program, disseminate new experiences and good practice, create a mechanism to ensure active participation of various parts in the program
- Cooperate with women and children organizations to upgrade education level of women and children. The activities will be coordinated with the government policy on improving women’ job opportunities and living standards, and a quality of schools.
- Collaborate with foreign assistance coordination and distribution units and with the relevant Ministries to extend foreign relations and cooperation.
- Include the collaborative research and trainings on acute problems and issues of non-formal education in the cooperation plans and agreements made with foreign countries.
- Develop joint projects, trainings, and workshops in cooperation with UNDP, UNESCO local organizations, Asian and Pacific Regional Agency, the Children Fund, the Center for Adult Education and Culture and other related organizations.

1.6.2. The National Program for Distance Education⁵

The National Program for Distance Educations is one of the paramount components of the government to implement the Dakar Framework for Action in EFA in Mongolia. The principal goal of this program is to enhance the accessibility of formal and non-formal education for the population through distance education in order to increase the efficiency and establish a stable structure of DE.

DE has an important role in increasing the efficiency, quality and access of pre-school, primary, basic, full secondary education, vocational training, technical and higher education service, in providing equal opportunities for children's development, in updating citizens' profession continuously through access to lifelong learning and increasing their life skill. Thus, DE Program aims to establish a DE National System, which will help to increase formal and non formal education service access, quality, efficiency and to develop life skill through access to life long learning. Specifically, it aims to:

- Establish DE policy co-ordination and management system
- Create DE service structure and activity mechanism
- Prepare DE specialists and develop human resource capacity
- Establish DE accessible, efficient DE material environment with quality
- Develop DE training content and methodology, to implement choosing appropriate form

To achieve its set objectives, the DE program has set the following implementation plans:

1. The Ministry of Science, Technology, Education and Culture (MOSTEC) will be in charge for providing distance education strategy management, planning, coordinating policy implementation, controlling evaluation of the program implementation and reporting to the Government. The MOSTEC will establish Advisory Committee, which will be composed of representatives from professional, business, governmental and non-governmental organizations, citizens and contributors headed by member of the Cabinet and the minister of the MOSTEC.

2. Surveys will be made jointly with the participation of all sectoral, professional and methodological organizations and project teams on needs for distance education; providing

⁵ Excerpted from the First Annex of Article of the Government of Mongolian, 2000, Distance Education Policy.

professional management in methodology to present services, organization of training, and preparation of sufficient human resources.

3. The Non formal Education Centre of MOSTEC will be in charge of collecting information from sectors providing distance education activity and to set up database, to give professional and methodological services for sectoral organizations and cooperative activities among sectors in national and local levels and making evaluations and assessments.

4. The Policy Implementation Committees headed by governors of aimag /provinces/ and cities will be in charge of administration management provisions in local levels. The Educational and Cultural Centers of aimags and cities with professional, methodological institutions of other sectors will direct for professional methodology, organizations of training in local levels.

5. Educational organizations of all levels will organize the distance education service in every local level.

In all the soums in this survey, non-formal education is regarded as the only alternative to formal education. According to Khash-Erdene, the regional director of the Ministry of Education and Culture, and Bat-Erdene NFE methodologist in Khovd aimag, the NFE program offers reading and writing programs for dropped out children using handbooks equivalent to those used in secondary schools. Mathematics and Mongolian language handbooks equivalent to primary education curriculum are also in use now. Before the training starts, the methodologists usually work out what certain curriculum should be used in the training. Children who performed excellently during the informal trainings are allowed to take the secondary schools' spring exams and they have a chance to earn the equivalency certificates certifying that they have completed primary and basic education.

They claim that the rate of drop out is decreasing per year because of the alternative training programs offered by the NFE. For example, those who drop out when they reach 15-16 years old attend the NFE programs and are able to secure equivalency certificates.

Mankham soum director, Kh. Barbataar however, explains that there is a drawback in informal training: those who finish the NFE program do not have sufficient level of knowledge but nevertheless, they are still able to get the equivalency certificate regarded as a credential for secondary higher education.

1.7. Review of Literature

Like other post-socialist countries grappling to rise from the ruins of the collapsed socialist system from which they were under until the 1990s, Mongolia is reinventing and transforming itself into a market economy. The transformation is a Herculean task, rooted as it is on the interplay of various social and economic institutions. Undoubtedly, one of the institutions that suffered as a result of the economic crisis in the 1990s is education, and as Mongolia now strives towards reforming its educational system it finds itself saddled with an increasing drop out rate

Cognizant of the importance of drop out rate in the educational system of Mongolia, this review thus analyzes the current drop out rate in Mongolia and the reasons behind the drop out incidence. The analysis is meant to frame and contextualize the results of the Mongolian Drop Out Study, which aims to determine the current rate and reasons behind the drop out rate in Mongolia based on empirical research. Such empirical grounding coupled with the wisdom of available literature on drop out rate is hoped to provide an informed and solid foundation from which Mongolian educational policies on drop out could be re-focused, re-channeled and re-configured as necessary. The review draws upon various studies made on the drop out rate in Mongolia mostly by international organizations and independent project evaluation teams.

The State of Mongolian Drop-Out Rate and Reasons Behind

“Herdsman, especially poor families, and some not poor families with large numbers of livestock, and families with few adults tend to take their boys out from school. In last five years we are buying foodstuff on credit and our accumulated debt is already over 300 thousand togrogs. Our relatives in the countryside were supporting us a little bit in food and clothing but now it has also lessened. One of my sons dropped out from 4th grade and is now helping my relatives in breeding livestock and this is the way that he feeds and clothes himself.”

A citizen of Huhmorit soum, Gobi-Altai aimag⁶

Citing the results of a 2000 study conducted by the MOECS, the 2001 Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper by the Mongolian government reports that 15.1% of children in rural areas do not study because they are employed in agriculture sector (need to herd their livestock), while in cities this percentage is 8.3%. Additionally, 6.4% of children in rural areas responded that they do not study

⁶ Source: Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP) 2001, The Government of Mongolia

because they are employed in urban settlements, while this percentage is 1.2 in cities. Majority of those who leave school are boys. The same study shows that the correlation between drop-outs and the number of livestock is higher in areas where the number of livestock is also high.

Based on the same report, the annual statistics for 2000/2001 show that preschool enrollment rates for boys (29.4%) and girls (31.9%) are similar, 30.6% are enrolled. Between the ages of 8- 11 the gap in enrollment widens between girls and boys from 119 thousand for girls to 117 thousand for boys. The gap is highest for ages 12-15, 94.2 thousand for boys 105.3 thousand for girls. The difference is bigger between the rural and urban populations. In the rural areas drop out rate of boys 12-15 is 23.3 % and for girls it is 13.2%. In academic year 2000-2001, 52.3% of primary and secondary school students were female, of which 50.1% in primary, 53.4% in middle and 59.4% in higher secondary schools were female. This indicates that starting from middle secondary school, female students prevail. Of these, 61.7% of boys dropped out of schools, between the ages 8-15. As the figures show, drop out rate differs by gender.

Otgonjargal (2003) notes that Mongolia is also in a unique situation in that more boys than girls drop out from schools. In terms of numbers, 44,700 children of whom 64% are boys are out of school in the secondary stream. Boys continuously fall as victims of the socio-economic transformation in the rural areas. As farm lands and rural economy move towards growth and reform, families find it more economically rewarding to keep boys in farming rather than sending them to school. (UNICEF, 2004). A unique characteristic of education in Mongolia is its female representation. Female domination is reported in the entire education system. By 2001 school attendance percentage in urban areas among the population between 7-29 years is 53.6% for males and 59.6% for females, whereas the estimation in rural schools is 32.8% and 39.3% respectively (B. Erdenesuren, 2001 cited in Altantsetseg, 2001 and Otgonjargal, 2003). At age of 16-19 years, only a third of males are present in school compared to almost half of the females. (Altantsetseg, 2001 as cited by Otgonjargal, 2003). By 1999, 61.9% of total students in public higher education institutions, and 70.4% of total students in private higher education were females (Mongolian education Sector Development Strategy 2000-2005, 2000 as cited by Otgonjargal, 2003).

Citing MOECS (2003), Otgonjargal (2003) further notes that the underlying rationales related to Mongolians' traditions and the current social and economic situation in the country may explain the unique phenomenon of female domination in the education sector. These include parents' preference of sending their girls over boys to school in case of choices due to limited resources, and higher percentage of male drop outs than females to join the labor market at an early age so as to help with the family income or to participate in home agriculture activities such as cattle herding. Needless to

say, problems in Mongolia's education system such as poor school conditions, poor quality of teaching learning especially in rural schools and inadequate recreational activities for youth outside school need to be addressed (UNICEF, 2004).

According to the Save the Children, which implemented The Herdsmen Children's Education Project in Omnogobi, Mongolia's largest province, since 1990, when Mongolia started moving from socialism to a market-society state, nearly 200,000 children in Mongolia have dropped out of school. It attributes this drop out rate to the fact that most are working children who reside in remote areas and who face enormous economic difficulties. Making the matter worse is the fact that these communities are quite distant from one another (320 kms in some cases) making access to education a formidable challenge especially for those children who are responsible for herding their families' livestock. As a result many children left and dropped out of school. Such distance between the drop out children's homes and the soum school is one of the common reasons behind the drop out problem in Mongolia.

The rural areas, including soums, have less access to education. In 2001, out of 307 soums it is reported that in 203 soums gross enrollment is lower than 80 percent. Because of the large territory and nomadic life style children do not have access to schools. There is also a real difficulty in providing herdsmen's children with dormitory facilities. Due to low population density in the rural areas compared to the national average, there is only one school in each soum and it is located 10-300 kms away from the herdsmen's home (IPRSP, 2001).

Herding the families' livestock is also regarded by the World Bank (2000) as a major reason for the drop out incidence especially by boys. In particular, the 2000 Poverty Reduction Strategy Formulation of the World Bank for Mongolia indicates that poverty has been virtually unknown in Mongolia until 1990, with inequality being very low. By 1995, however, 36.3% of the population fell below the poverty line, with a significant increase in inequality. The maternal mortality rate grew twice between 1991 and 1993 from 13 to 26 per 10,000 births. School enrollment rates declined and drop-outs increased, partly because of the increased demand for labor (particularly boys) in livestock production. As a result, it is estimated that literacy rates have fallen by 1% a year over 1990-98 to around 87%.

As regards literacy, the Education For All (EFA) 2000 Assessment by UNESCO (2000) also reports that in the 1990's, when the transition period happened, many non-enrolled and drop out children's lack of education became a problem for their further education. To address this problem, the Mongolian Government turned its attention to improving their lowest educational level, particularly, to develop their literacy and increase their capacity to make use of their knowledge in congruence with their need for re-education.

Consequently, literacy has become the main focus of the State, both for the drop outs and the illiterate adults. The State pays for the expenses of literacy training courses provided by general education institutions and education and cultural centers. Currently, joint projects are undertaken by the non-governmental and international organizations to make drop out children and youth literate, and to give them primary education.

Apart from herding or helping herd the family livestock, a number of reasons are cited as reasons behind the drop out rate in Mongolia. A Mongolian Adolescents Needs Assessment Survey conducted by the Mongolian UNDP Organization and the Mongolian Ministry of Health and Social Services in 2000 reveal that 65.7 % of the NGO employees and teachers who participated in the survey point to poverty and unemployment as the main reasons; 21% cited lack of interest and, 15.8%, the need for increased manpower since the herds were privatized. The results also point to the lack of attention from teachers, the discontinuation of programs to prevent drop out and the absence of penalties for parents.

The survey also reports that as to obstacles to adolescents receiving education, bullying, lack of interest and illness rank as the three most common factors affecting adolescent access to education. 36.5 %, or roughly one third of the respondents in the urban areas, point to bullying by their peers as the number one reason why they stay away from schools, with 37.3% from the aimags and 35.3% from the rural areas citing the same reason. The lack of dormitories facilities is also reported to be a significant obstacle.

The issue on lack of dormitories is traced back to the boarding school system Mongolia had prior to the transition period wherein dormitories were open to all, serving all students whether rich or poor. When the transition set in, however, attended by consequent crises, economic and otherwise, one of those directly affected was the boarding school system, which suffered from lack of funding. Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2005) explain that the government responded by shutting down completely or partially using the boarding schools that were due for major repair during the first half of the 1990s; and from 1996-2000, imposed the "Meat Requirement" policy, which required parents of boarders to pay for dormitory meals. The Meat Requirement provided that a family had to pay for 70 kg of meat per child a year (equivalent to two or three sheep), an amount beyond the means of low-income herder families and eventually resulted to many poor school-aged children to drop out.

Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2005) further note that before the transition the dormitories served both rich and poor students but, when they became financially strapped because of the ensuing economic crisis, the maintenance of the dormitories suffered. Thus, they ended up dilapidated, with not enough

heating and with poor hygienic conditions. As a result, those parents who could afford it pulled out their children from the dormitories and had them settled in apartments they either rent or own; those who did not have the means but, had relatives living near the schools had their children live temporarily with said relatives, while those who did not have means and no relatives with whom their children could stay simply pulled out their children from school.

The “lack of interest” reason needs a second look however, since a 2003 study on “The Living Conditions of the Children in Peri-Urban Areas of Ulaanbaatar” reveals that only few children cited “lack of interest” on why they dropped out. Majority of them are reported to be “angry or disappointed” when they were told not to go to school anymore.

In the same study, poverty is cited as not the only reason why children dropped out of school to go to work. Other major reasons are: the difficulty of getting in or reintegrating into school after a leave of absence or sick leave; the absence of transfer documentation for new comers to the city; the poor relationships with an “unfriendly” teacher often related to the “extra money” issue, where teachers find other means to augment their low pay, and poor relationship with other classmates.

Another problem reported on the Needs Assessment survey is the lack of teacher skills and neglect and abuse by teachers, (14.6% from the urban areas, 13.2% from the aimag centers, and 9.8% from the rural areas). Results of the focus group interview also show that adolescents fear expressing themselves openly to their teachers as they may be victimized as a consequence. They also note that some teachers are too occupied trying to earn extra money to supplement their low pays to pay attention to their students.

Parents’ attitude is also mentioned as obstacle to access to education. Such attitude is characterized by parents giving low value to education as reported by 13.7% of adolescents from aimag centers, 9.5% from the urban areas, and 10.2% from the rural areas. In the rural areas, there are some families who regard herding (in the case of boys) and domestic chores (in the case of girls) more valuable and of greater priority than education.

The same survey also cites the differences in how some teachers treat their students with urban adolescents given preferential treatment over their rural counterparts. Teachers and other adults are reported to have different attitude towards boys and girls: girls are regarded to be quiet and disciplined while boys are generally regarded to be unruly, disobedient and troublemakers. Teachers are also reported to differentiate between children of different backgrounds and the societal status of the family bears much significance on the way students are treated.

A 2004 evaluation study on the Rural Schools Development Program also looked into the drop out rate in Mongolia. The study focused on what the project team calls: “the politics of statistics on the issue of school drop out” (Steiner-Khamsi , Stolpe and Amgaabazar, 2004. p.85), where figures of drop out rates are conveniently inflated to secure international grants and funding and retroactively deflated once the funds are granted. Because of figure manipulation, official statistics and records on drop out rate are riddled with inconsistencies. For example, the team cites a case in the 1990s when the drop out rate was reported as 20% and based on this figure, Mongolia was awarded grants by international donors. Ten years after, the figure was retroactively adjusted to 8.8%.

Steiner-Khamsi, Stolpe and Amgaabazar (2004) also critically analyze the decrease in the drop out rate for the last ten years. They note that from a high of 8.8% of all school-aged children in 1994, the figure dropped to a record low of 2.4% in 2003. They argue that official statistics do not accurately indicate the situation of children that were left out (never enrolled) or dropped out. They note at least two problems with the way drop outs are reported or registered: first, all school-aged children who re-enrolled in two or three-week non-formal education classes are removed from the “drop-out” category; and, second, poverty-related drop-outs are systematically downplayed in the official statistics thus, if one were to believe the official statistics on poverty related drop out, there would only be 80 poverty-related female drop-outs in all of the city of Ulaanbaatar. They likewise point out that schools have dismissed drop-outs as a social problem, much less a problem of schools. They recommend therefore that initiatives be focused on changing the attitude between poor and non-poor students, and for the government and international donors, aside from providing material resources, to initiate integrative measures that would enhance interactions between the poor and the non-poor students; more importantly, that a portion of the Small Projects program be allotted to support poor students.

Notwithstanding the multifarious reasons surrounding the drop out issue however, the rate of its occurrence from 1991-1992, the early years of the transition to the current year, is reported to be decreasing as the figures in Table 1 indicate. But as Steiner-Khamsi, Stolpe and Amgaabazar (2004) suggest however, is it really?

**TABLE 1. Percentage Drop Out Rate from Academic Year
1991-1992 to 2004-2005⁷**

⁷ Source: National Statistics Office of Mongolia, draft data compilation by the Education statistician provided by Ambaagazar, Gherelma; the authors gratefully thank Amgaabazar Gherelmaa, Open Forum, Ulaanbaatar for sharing her sources and policy research findings on the drop out issue in Mongolia.

School year	Drop outs	Total student population	Percentage of drop outs in the total student population
1991-1992	33530	411696	8.1
1992-1993	33886	384069	8.8
1993-1994	23073	370302	6.2
1994-1995	16346	381204	4.3
1995-1996	14272	403847	3.5
1996-1997	16095	418293	3.8
1997-1998	14804	435061	3.4
1998-1999	15053	447121	3.4
1999-2000	13696	470038	2.9
2000-2001	13751	494554	2.8
2001-2002	13730	510291	2.7
2002-2003	11426	527931	2.2
2003-2004	11953	538398	2.2
2004-2005	10770	557346	1.9

1.8. Goals and Objectives:

The main aims of the Mongolia drop out study were:

1.8.1. Identify the Depth of the Problem

The Mongolia drop out study aimed to determine the seriousness of the problem related to school drop out rate in Mongolia. It focused on the level of compulsory education since succeeding on the compulsory level of education is the basic precondition of further schooling and successful adult life. It thus looked into the school drop out rates with regards to children and young people of up to 16 years of age.

1.8.2. Raise Awareness About the Issue of School Drop outs

Mongolia's education system, as with all the countries participating in the monitoring project have recently undergone extensive education reforms initiatives. Since the actual drop out rate in Mongolia can never be actually pinned down, the project also aimed to raise awareness among professional education practitioners, stakeholders and the wider public about this issue. It was envisioned that the results of the monitoring will determine the severity of the problem in Mongolia and will be used to call attention to the negative consequences of school drop outs for the society.

1.8.3. Assess the Actual Influence of Different Factors

The Mongolia drop out study further aimed to assess the influence of different factors leading to school drop outs in Mongolia. The investigation of the possible factors leading to school drop out served as a valuable information base for further study of the existing preventive measures as well as for developing recommendations for new ones, as necessary.

1.8.4. Assess the Content and Implementation of Existing Regulations /Legislation

Another stage of the Mongolia drop out study aimed at assessing the content, implementation and effects of existing regulations and legislation dealing with school drop out prevention in Mongolia.

1.8.5. Develop Indicators and Recommendations Based on the Findings

Recommendations were formulated for presentation to the public, professional education community, and education policy makers. Recommendations were based on the information and results gathered throughout the study on the depth of the issue of school drop outs, main factors influencing it and thereafter resulting to its incidence after assessing and comparing regulations and legislation aimed at preventing school drop outs. Based on these, the project also aimed to formulate a set of indicators for continuous monitoring.

1.9. Methodology

The Mongolia drop out study envisioned two types of report: an international one and one specific to Mongolia. The Mongolian report, as a matter of course, was specific to Mongolia. Using the common framework used in the overall Drop Out project, the Mongolia drop out study analyzed:

- methodologies to account for drop-outs;
- definitions and descriptions of drop-out and different related terms (withdrawing from school, early school leavers, street child and others) used in Mongolia;
- policies towards school drop outs in Mongolia;

1.9.1. Stage 1 – Determining and Assessing the Policy for Accounting School Drop out

As with the other participating countries in the Drop Out project, the drop out study in Mongolia first focused on assessing and determining the policy for accounting for school drop outs. The results of said analysis were submitted to the project coordinating office of the Open Society Institute Educational Support Program. They will then form part of a comparative study on the different policies of the participating countries and their different approaches, and further assess information value and accurateness of these policies.

Mongolia's report also focused on assessing the effectiveness of current policy of accounting for school drop outs. Mongolia is on the same boat as other countries where official statistics either underestimate the real situation or, fail to take into account certain considerations or, certain groups of population or, provide insufficient information about the school drop out rates. The Mongolia drop out study attempted to determine if school drop out is a serious problem in Mongolia and if available statistics provide an accurate picture of the situation.

Cognizant of the fact that official statistics could not be relied upon, the accurateness of the official statistics was triangulated by combining statistical data from different sources as well as direct data collecting from five test aimags in Mongolia. The accurateness of the accounting policies was measured against the results of the comparative analysis of statistical data from various sources and agencies and by comparing the official statistical data provided with data gathered in the sample test aimags.

1.9.2. Stage 2: Country Specific Definition of Drop out Rate

The Mongolia drop out study further focused on providing a definition of school drop out rate specific to Mongolia in full consideration of the circumstance, legislation as well as policies that may lead to various different important groups of children that will fall under its wider definition of a school drop out. Specifically, the Mongolian study also looked at the incidence of boys drop out and the purported decreasing trend on the drop out rate.

1.9.3. Stage 3: Determining the Main Factors Leading to School Drop outs

An important goal of the drop out project in Mongolia was to study and determine the main factors leading to school drop outs. In analyzing its results, qualitative research methods were used including:

1.9.3.1. Field research – direct contact and interviews with various relevant parties, e.g. social workers, parents of drop outs, drop outs, teachers, policemen etc.

1.9.3.2. Survey of school headmasters, for parents, teachers, drop outs, non-drop outs, for relevant organizations;

1.9.3.3. Focus groups – core questions and the outline of qualitative survey were designed as agreed upon by all of the countries for comparability.

1.10. Hypotheses

Data analysis was also based on the various factors leading to school drop out. The analysis of various factors leading to school drop out was cross-checked with the hypotheses for why students

drop out. Mongolia adapted some of the hypotheses suggested by the project group, viz.: conflict situations with teachers (teacher discrimination in the Mongolian study); low economic status of the family (poverty and low income); aggressive behavior (bullying or conflict with classmates); poor academic performance, poor attendance and school repetition (poor school performance); low educational status of parents (educational level of parents); insufficient counseling service in the schools (communication with drop out children and their parents); and social problems (child labor). It also added some of its own: rural and urban migration (covering distance between home and school, nomadic lifestyle and other related issues); availability of dormitories and systemic problems within the Mongolian educational system.

2. Design of the Study

2.1. Sampling Design

Mongolia is administratively divided into 21 aimags and the capital city, Ulaanbaatar. Aimags are divided into 340 soums, which are further divided into 1,671 baghs (small villages averaging 2-5 gers). The capital city, Ulaanbaatar (UB), is divided into 9 districts, from which 4 are suburban, which are in turn divided into 121 khoroos or sub-districts.

Stratified random sampling was used in the survey. The first step of the sampling procedure was to select the regions and aimags. The selection was based on the following factors:

- region: east, north, west, south; these regions vary in their climatic and environmental characteristics, income level and living standards, type of economic activity, infrastructure, and availability of social services; and
- distribution and fluctuation of drop out rate in regions exhibiting the three levels of drop out rate: high, middle and low.

Based on these factors and on the stated Mongolian hypotheses, five regions were chosen: four aimags, Uvukhangai, Dornod, Khovd, Dornogobi, and UB. The total number of drop outs of the chosen aimags as of 2003 is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Population Distribution and Number of Drop Outs Per Aimag as of 2004-2005⁸

Province/ capital	Total Number of Soums	Population (Thousand persons)	Urban population %	Rural population%	Number of DO per aimag		%age of DO per aimag	
					Total	Female	Total %	Female %
Ulaanbaatar	9	893.4	100		460	155	4.27	3.57
Uvukhangai	19	113.2	19.2	80.8	1219	472	11.32	10.87
Dornod	14	74.4	50	50	188	59	1.75	1.36
Khovd	17	87.5	33.5	66.5	219	83	2.03	1.91
Dornogobi	14	52.1	53.0	47	280	90	2.60	2.07

The second step was the selection of soums and baghs applying the same selection process. The third step involved the random sampling of the respondents based on the 2003-2004 drop out joint survey report of NFE and the UNICEF and the school records of the said aimags and soums and the local NFE offices. The total number of respondents and the corresponding instrument per category of respondents used is shown in Table 3.

⁸ Source: MOECS, 2004-2005.

TABLE 3. Total Number of Respondents and Instruments Used Per Group

Respondents	Aimags	Questionnaire	Interview	Focus-Group Interview/ Number of Participants	Total Number of Respondents
Drop outs	Ulaanbaatar	52	1	2/20 (40)	93
	Khovd	34	5	1/15 (15)	54
	Dornod	34		1/10 (10)	44
	Uvurkhangai	34	1		35
	Dornogobi	34		1/10 (10)	44
Subtotal		188	7	5/55 (75)	270
At-risk children	Ulaanbaatar	14	1		15
	Khovd	8	1		9
	Dornod	12	1		13
	Uvurkhangai	16		1/8 (8)	24
	Dornogobi	18	1		19
Subtotal		68	4	1/8 (8)	80
Parents	Ulaanbaatar	20	1		21
	Khovd	18	1		19
	Dornod	18			18
	Uvurkhangai	18	1		19
	Dornogobi	18			18
Subtotal		92	3		95
Teachers	Ulaanbaatar	12	1	1/10 (10)	23
	Khovd	7			7
	Dornod	9			9
	Uvurkhangai	12	1		13
	Dornogobi	14		1/10 (10)	24
Subtotal		54	2	2/20 (20)	76
Headmaster	Ulaanbaatar		1		1
	Dornogobi		1		1
Policymaker	Ulaanbaatar		2		2
Educational methodologist	Ulaanbaatar		1		1
	Khovd		1		1
NFE teacher	Dornogobi		1		1
Policemen	Ulaanbaatar		1		1
	Uvurkhangai		1		1
Social worker	Dornod		1		1
	Khovd		1		1
Total		402	27	8/ 83 (103)	532

2.2. Sample Population

The following were identified as the sample population of this study: the drop out children themselves; potential drop out or at risk children; teachers from both the formal and informal education programs; parents of drop out children; and local and national government officials, formal and informal educational officers, policymakers, policemen and officers from the MOECS.

In identifying the drop out children, the teams referred to the NFE-UNICEF survey report and informed the school administrators, soums/baghs officials and NFE methodologists that based on the report,

there is an X number of drop out in the soum/bagh. The report was acknowledged by the school administrators (those who had copies, anyway) but, since the report did not indicate the identity or the addresses of the drop out children, the teams relied on the records of the school soums and the NFE methodologists. It must be noted that in some soums, for example, in Buyant, the NFE-UNICEF report matched the records of the school in terms of the number of drop out, This indicates that the NFE-UNICEF report is also used by the school administrators. This is no surprise since, as will be explained on the section on how drop outs (see 4.2) are reported and counted, there is a very strong coordination between the school administrators, soum/bagh officials and the NFE local offices.

Thus, the drop out children, at-risk children and parents were identified by the local administrators and staff, school officials and/or local NFE methodologists who contacted them and asked to participate in the survey. Those who were not around were reached by the teams by going to the drop out children's and parent's houses with the school administrators, NFE methodologists and sometimes with the teachers, who knew where the drop out children and/or their parents lived. There were cases when the neighbors were approached as well to locate those who no longer lived in the areas where the school officials or NFE methodologists thought they did. It must be noted that not all of them were reached since some were nomads while some left for warmer places.

The study defined at-risk children using these indicators:

- Poor family
- Big family (4 or more children with 1 or 2 children who already dropped out);
- Working after the school;
- High rate of truancy; and
- Prolonged unexcused absences

The first four groups were the subjects of the structured questionnaires used in the study while the last group was the subject of focus group discussions and interviews. The total number of respondents was 532 (see Table 3). The drop out sample included children aged 8-16, and involved children who dropped out since 1996.

2.3. Study Instruments

The team prepared four questionnaires one for each sample population. The questionnaires were semi-structured in the sense that there were some open-ended questions. The questionnaires for the parents, teachers and drop out children were based on the Albanian questionnaires, which were recommended by the OSIESP central monitoring project group based in Budapest. The questionnaires were modified by the Mongolian members of the team after reviewing the Albanian-

based ones and realized that some of the questions do not apply to Mongolian circumstance. They were then modified to fit in questions specific to Mongolian circumstance such as proximity of house to the school, whether living in a ger⁹ or a house, amount and frequency of vodka drinking, etc., after which they were translated in Mongolian. The questionnaires for the parents and teachers were also translated in English for the benefit of the DO research associate who was assisting in coordinating the survey and in administering the questionnaires for parents and teachers.

A separate questionnaire for at-risk children or those who have the potential of dropping out was also developed by the Mongolian team. All the questionnaires underwent a series of revisions especially after they were piloted and reviewed by the international consultant and staff of MEA. The final versions were completed on January 7, 2005, a day before the teams traveled to the countryside. The team also developed interview guides to help them in conducting the interviews and help them in soliciting answers from the respondents.

⁹ Traditional Mongolian dwelling made of a wooden framework covered by large pieces of felt.

3. Implementation of the Study

3.1. Data Collection

Five teams were created to conduct the survey and collect data. Each team was assigned a particular aimag. Synchin Dorjnamjin, Assistant Researcher, National Center for Non-Formal and Distance Education led the team in Dornod; Tsetsenbileg Tseveen, Researcher, Mongolian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Philosophy, Dornogobi; Tumendelger Sengedorj, Lecturer, Sociology, Mongolian State University of Education, Uvukhangai.

Bolormaa Tsetsegee, Unit Manager, Needs Assessment, Mongolian Educational Alliance and Mercedes del Rosario, International Educational Policy Studies, Teachers College, Columbia University, Research Associate for the DO project, led the survey in Khovd; and Enkhbold Delger, Researcher, Mongolian Academy of Science, Institute of Philosophy, Sociology and Law and Bayarsaihan Bayartsetseg, Assistant of Social Science Faculty of Mongolian State University of Education, UB.

Prior to the actual field visits, the teams made arrangements with the respective aimag regional directors who are part of the regional network of MEA. The arrangements involved coordinating the teams' visit with the soums' directors and soums' school principals or headmasters and the local education ministry officers including the methodologists and social workers from the NFE. Such arrangements facilitated the interviews and meetings the teams conducted and their eventual trips to the baghs for the teams' individual encounters with and to locate some drop out children and/or their parents.

Because of the limited time the teams had to conduct the survey before the soum schools closed for winter vacation, and the amount time required to get from one bagh to the other, the teams were assisted by the aimag/soum director/staff and/or methodologists from the NFE in collecting data. In UB, however, interviewers were hired to assist the team due to the large scale of work.

In both cases, the hired interviewers and those who assisted the teams were given specific instructions on how to administer the questionnaires. They were briefed on what the study is all about, the structure of the questionnaire as well as what the questions meant to elicit, what the codes meant and how to take down the responses.

The administration of the questionnaires was done by reading over each question to each respondent. For the multiple choice questions, all possible answers were listed down as choices thus, the teams did not have to read the choices to the respondents. Answers that did not belong to the list were noted down under "Other." The responses to the multiple choice questions were then recorded by marking the code that corresponds to each answer. The responses to the open-ended questions were noted down on the space provided in the questionnaires.

To minimize, if not avoid, bias, the respondents were made to individually enter the room where the questioning was held and instructed not to talk to the others when they leave the room. In the baghs, the questionnaires were administered inside the gers, where in most cases, the family members who happened to be around, watched or listened, but not intervened in the sessions. In the few cases where there were two respondents from a certain family (e.g., two drop out brothers or a parent and a drop out child) one of them is taken to another ger or inside the jeep used by the team.

The sessions with the parents and teachers lasted around 20-30 minutes while the ones with the drop out and at-risk children averaged 35-40 minutes each. All of them were held in Mongolian except in Khovd where the sessions with parents and teachers were done in English and then translated into Mongolian.

The interviews with the local education officers, aimag and soum directors, school principals and headmasters and the NFE methodologists and social workers were conducted separately. In most cases, they were held prior to the administration of the questionnaires. The interviews were not structured but, the teams were instructed to ask questions and collect records and data on the status of drop out in the soum or in the school, the reasons behind the drop out, if there is any emerging pattern in terms of its incidence (decrease or increase), and possible recommendations from the soums' or local schools' perspectives.

The teams also conducted focus group interviews. The UB, Khovd, Dornod, and Dornogobi teams did one each with drop out children; Uvurkhangai did one with at-risk drop out children; UB and Dornogobi also had one each with teachers (see Table 3).

3.2. Triangulation of the Data

Cognizant of the conflicting figures regarding the drop out rate, the team triangulated the data to arrive at a more definitive understanding of how drop out is conceived and defined by different stakeholders, how the drop out rate is calculated and to have a better approximation of the drop out rate per se. The

triangulation was done by comparing official statistics from government agencies, responses from the participants, and local school records.

3.3. Data Quality Control

The raw data collected from the teams was given for controlling and inputting to the Mongolian State University of Education. Five to 10% of the data was randomly verified to ensure that the data is keyed in correctly using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The first step of data cleaning involved the checking for illegal values, outliers and wild codes. The second step was a logical check for logically inconsistent values especially skipped questions.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1. Definition(s) of Drop Out

The definition of drop out varies depending on who is defining it, although it officially refers to children who quit after attending a period of formal schooling. The official terminology used by the Ministry of Education, in compliance with the Education Law's requirement of mandatory enrolment in basic education (grades 1 through 9), defines dropouts as children at the age of compulsory basic education (currently 7 through 16) who are not attending school (Battsetseg, 2005, p.1 as cited by Amgaabazar, 2005)¹⁰.

At the soums visited by the teams, however, local school officials extend it to include those who never enrolled and those who did not finish secondary school education. For teachers, drop outs are children who never attended school or those who incurred prolonged unexcused absences and were dropped from the list, or those children who just quit school. For both children and parents, dropouts are those who had neither secondary education nor secondary higher education.

The definition of who a drop out is of prime importance since it materially affects how drop outs are counted. In all the aimags covered in this study a drop out ceases to be one once s/he attends the NFE program. In all the soums visited, except in Erdeneburen in Khovd aimag and Zuunbayan-Ulaan in Uvurkhangai aimag, disabled children were never registered or counted as drop outs. In fact, from all the soums in Uvurkhangai aimag in it was only in Zuunbayan-Ulaan where there was a registered case of admittance of one deaf child in a school.

4.2. Information Base: Registration and Computation of School Drop Outs

MOECS collects and processes statistical data related to school drop out across Mongolia using these two standard forms.¹¹

- 1) Approved by order of the chairman of the National Statistical Office (NSO) #114 of 2003 the form "BSE-3" (Basic Secondary Education). This form allows the centralized gathering of data in a particular aimag or local level on children aged 8-15 who entered the school in pursuit of basic education and dropped out, or who never entered the school. The form summarizes the number of children by grade, sex, age and reason for drop out.

¹⁰ Amgaabazar Gherelmaa (2005), op.cit.

¹¹ Source: MOECS statistics, 2005.

2) Approved by the Minister of Education, Culture and Science Order #221 of 2003 the form “BSE-9” which is a non-centralized form (it was changed to the “Administrative data” by the Statistics Law of 2004). The purpose of this form to monitor the move and change in number of pupils who studied at the previous academic year and successfully passed to the next grade, and pupils who newly enrolled. The methodology involves: number of pupils in the previous academic year minus number of pupils who left the school plus number of newly registered or enrolled pupils. By using this form it is possible to determine the number of schoolchildren who dropped out while comparing the number from the previous year. The form also provides information on the reason of dropout, grade and sex of those who dropped out.

Upon scrutiny however, the above methodology was noted to have one serious flaw: although information is elicited in terms of reason for school change, i.e., “Transfer within the aimag or transfer to other aimag, city”, which is an indicator, there is no established controlling or monitoring system to determine if children who transfer actually re-enter the school at the aimag or soum/bagh they migrate to. If the transfer occurs within the aimag, then the number of increased pupils at the aimag will be equal to number who transferred. However, at present these numbers are different.

In compliance with the MOECS procedures, schools calculate the number of dropouts by subtracting the number of children enrolled during the current year from the number of children enrolled in the previous year. The data collected is sent to the MOECS¹². The Ministry gets informed about how many children are enrolled at schools from capitals of provinces and the capital of Mongolia at the beginning of each academic year. The parliament holds on to the statistics and is confirmed by the population census. There are unconfirmed reports however, that the Ministry of Finance, which authorizes budget releases on student expenses (school budgets depend largely on the headcount of students enrolled per school), sometimes finds the education ministry’s records on total number of students enrolled bloated.

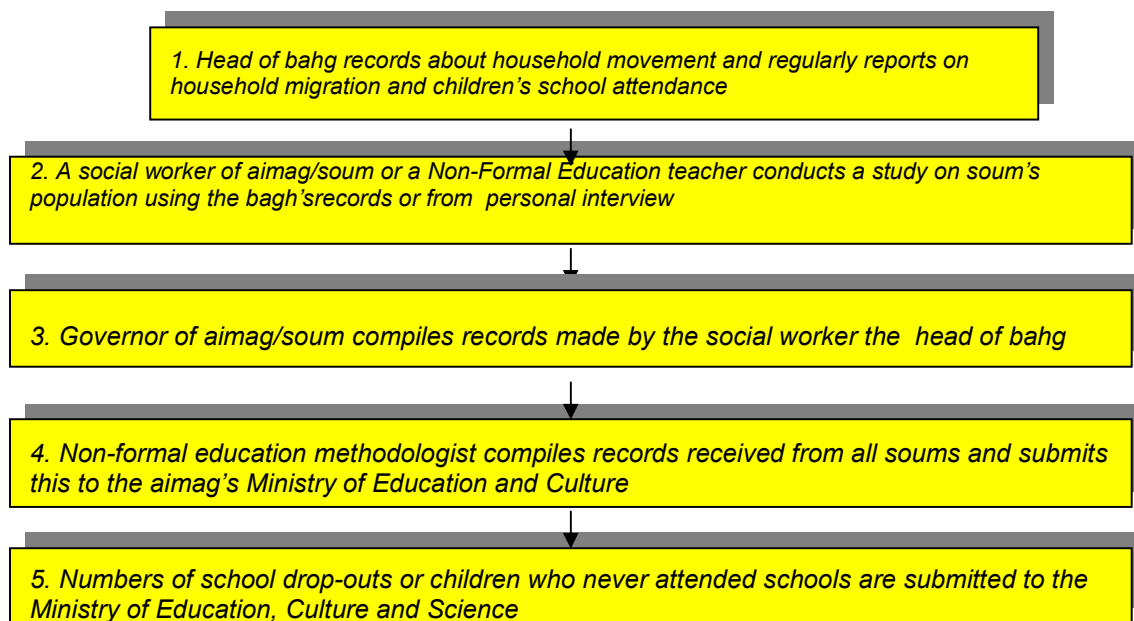
In Dornod aimag the monitoring of drop outs is conducted every year. During the first week of December of each year, a survey is administered by the Livestock Census Commission. The survey is done through the use of a feedback form. The bagh head conducts the annual census, which is

¹² Based on interviews with local education and MOECS officials

designed to determine the number of livestock and its fluctuation. During this survey, the bagh director also takes a population census and completes and files the feedback form.

From 1 September to 15 October, the MOECS gathers statistics on secondary education. Ten questionnaires are used and submitted during the said period. In other periods, the NFE methodologist prepares the drop out questionnaire used to gather the drop out data. The phases involved in the counting process are shown on Figure 1. The process starts with the bagh head monitoring household movement and migration and the school attendance of children. The data gathered is then submitted to the aimag or soum or to a teacher from the NFE, who conducts a survey on the soum's population using the said data or conducts separate personal interviews. The step is repeated until the data reaches the local office of the MOECS and finally, the central office of the MOECS.

FIGURE 1. Phases in Counting the Number of School Drop Outs



In UB, schools calculate drop out children by number differences. If, for example, the number of children enrolled at one school was twenty-eight in autumn and stayed the same twenty-eight in spring, the school considers that there are no dropouts in their school. However, three or four children might have already dropped out from the school while another three or four children might have entered. This fact is not considered by schools. Moreover, children are assigned to particular classes

and they are counted only at the beginning and end of each academic semester. Those who quit in the middle of the term are not counted.

The NFE calculates based on the statistics taken from social workers by the administrative units of districts. The administrative units work among their small sections and collect the data. They conduct district surveys twice a year: in autumn and spring. Leaders of sections collect their data and submit it to the administrative units then the administrative units systematize the data and submit it to the districts, and the districts then compile the data and submit it to the state educational department.

In UB, the team gathered that there were recent questions about the validity of data collected from social workers of administrative units and social workers of schools. It was contented that most of the data collected was not reliable since the numbers submitted in autumn differed radically from the numbers submitted in spring. The disparity was attributed to migrations and transfers, population changes and settlements and the experience or, lack of it, of social workers collecting data.

The results of the study also showed how the bagh directors and NFE work together in identifying and calculating drop out children. In Uvurkhangai, the bagh directors identify the school dropouts based on each household and submit the list of drop out to the NFE methodologist. In some soums the methodologists visit the households together with the bagh directors and both of them share and keep records. Thus, there are not much differences between previously recorded (kept by the governors' office in soums, schools and methodologists of non-formal education and training programs) and the newly collected data. This was also true in Khovd where the identification and counting of the number of the children who dropped out is a joint effort of the aimag administration, the governor's office, the school directors, the NFE methodologists and bagh directors.

The materiality of the definition of who or what a drop out is and therefore, on how the drop out rate is calculated, was found to directly affect the records of soum schools. Except for Erdeneburen in Khovd aimag and Zuunbayan-Ulaan in Uvurkhangai aimag, the other soums and aimags do not count disabled children as drop outs. In Uvurkhangai records are made only for children who live in their home, but those children who live with other families or live with their families temporarily in soums, or those children whose families do not have an official residency in soums are not counted and registered at all.

The results also showed how records are kept. In Hovsgol, Hatanbulag soums in Dornogobi, Uyanga and Arvaikheer soums in Uvurkhangai the study teams found cases when children over 15 years old¹³ were registered as school children. The main reason for this error was attributed to the inefficient handling and updating of records for large and remote population, which is made worse by high migration rate, work overload of work of methodologists and at times, miscommunication between the bagh directors and NFE methodologists. There were also cases where the school social workers claimed that they conducted surveys and kept drop out records but could not show proof that they actually did.

4.3. Comparison of Drop Out Rates by Different Agencies

According to the census of 2003, there are 17,671 school drop-outs nationwide. The 2003 Human Rights and Freedoms in Mongolia Status Report, National Human Rights Commission of Mongolia indicates, however, that 13.5 % of all school-ages children or a total of 68,115 dropped out in 2003. The UNICEF-NFE drop out survey reports, on the other hand, a total of 40,000 drop outs for 2003. The MOECS and the National Statistics Office records, meanwhile, show a total of 11,953 drop outs for academic years 2003-2004 as seen on Table 4.

TABLE 4. Comparative Figures on Drop Out Rate 2003-2004

Agency	Drop Out Statistics	Difference from Highest Figure
Human Rights Commission	68, 115	
UNICEF/NFE	40,000	28, 115
Census 2003	17,671	50,444
MOSTEC/NSO	11,953	56,162

As noted, none of the figures match. There is a 56,162 difference (17.55%) between the Human Rights Commission's and MOECS/NSO's figures but, no data is available explaining the difference, or for that matter the differences among all the figures. The team could only attribute the differences towards the various definitions of drop out and the lack of standard procedures and methods of counting drop outs. As well, to what Steiner-Khamsi, Stolpe and Amgaabazar (2004) refer to as the "statistical eradication of drop outs," (p. 85), where statistics on the number of drop outs are officially downplayed when the government finds it expedient to do so. Steiner-Khamsi, Stolpe and Amgaabazar (2004) explain that: "Almost all project schools reported a significant decrease in drop-

¹³ The Education Law of 2002 re-classifying school age children from 8-15 to 7-16 who are subject to compulsory education only took effect

outs, and many stated furthermore that their drop-out problem has been completely “eradicated.” The steady decrease of drop-outs has been purported in official statistics over the past ten years, not only in project schools but in all schools, with a peak of 8.8% of all school-aged children in 1994, and an all time low of 2.4% in 2003” (p. 85).

As discussed in the review of literature (see 1.7), they also argue that official statistics do not accurately indicate the situation of children that were left out (never enrolled) or dropped out. They note at least two problems with the way drop outs are reported or registered: first, all school-aged children who re-enrolled in two or three-week non-formal education classes are removed from the “drop-out” category; and, second, poverty-related drop-outs are systematically downplayed in the official statistics thus, if one were to believe the official statistics on poverty related drop out, there would only be 80 poverty-related female drop-outs in all of the city of Ulaanbaatar. They likewise point out that schools have dismissed drop-outs as a social problem, much less a problem of schools

4.4. Drop out Reasons

Based on the results of the survey, the following are the most common reasons why children drop out. They are broadly categorized into reasons that are considered as policy focus areas and understudied areas.

Policy Focus Areas

1. Poverty/low income or lack of means of subsistence
2. Child-labor related reasons such as herding, need to earn a living to help support the family, and need to take care of siblings or older members of the family
3. Migration
4. Lack of dormitories
5. Teacher discrimination
6. Systemic problems with the education system

Understudied Areas

1. Physical and/or mental disabilities
2. Lack of communication and socialization skills
3. Bullying or peer discrimination
4. Educational level of parents

4.4.1. Policy Focus Areas

4.4.1.1. Poverty/low income

Assessment of the responses revealed the divergent points of view among three target groups. Parents and teacher respondents pointed to poverty as the number one reason while drop out children noted that they dropped out because they need to herd in order to help the family earn income (see Table 5).

**TABLE 5. Comparison of Questionnaire Responses
By Drop Out Children, Parents and Teachers**

REASONS FOR DROPPING OUT	ANSWERS /multiple choice/					
	Children		Parents		Teachers	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
poverty/low income/ couldn't buy school supplies/clothing	49	23.1	57	50.5	20	37.0
herd livestock/work/ run household/look after younger siblings	70	32.9	18	15.6	1	1.9
dormitory/boarding						
difficulties/homeless/homesick	57	26.9	21	19.2	NR	NR
Migration	16	7.5	9	8.3	2	3.7
timid/poor communication skills/child was sick	37	17.5	NR*	NR	5	9.3
teacher discrimination/poor relation with teacher	12	5.7	23	21.1		
physically/mentally disabled			19	17.4	7	13.0
not interested to study in school	40	18.9	13	11.9	6	11.1
didn't pass the exams/ poor performance	17	9.4	18	16.5		
lack of attention, parental pressure	3	1.4	NR	NR	9	16.7
parents were sick/ alcohol addiction problems	22	10.4	9	8.1	NR	NR
others: peer discrimination; engagement in anti-social activities, to become a lama	2	1	1	1.9	1	1.9

* NR - No response

The field interviews support the findings. In UB, for example, the parents of the children who responded to the survey have no permanent sources of livelihood or income. Some of them sell

whatever they can in what is so called “black market.” They have very low living standards and are considered to belong to the “vulnerable social group.”¹⁴

All the districts where the survey was conducted in UB have big markets, such as ‘Naratuul,’ ‘Tsaiz,’ ‘Da Khuree,’ and ‘Bayan Zurkh’ markets in Bayan Zurkh district, ‘Kar Khorin’ market in Songino Khairkhan district and ‘Khuchit Shonkhor’ market in Chingeltei district. Most of the parents of the drop out children work in these markets.

The drop out children also work in these markets: they wash cars, watch after them, sell TV program guides, carry loads, sell odd cigarettes and bandages, work as microbus conductors, or help drivers of minibuses get their passengers by calling out these minibuses’ routes loudly. The interviews taken from the drop children revealed that the children dropped out in order to earn money to support their families. There are on the average, 3-8 members per family, which the children have to help and support.

Parents interviewed in the survey also point to poverty as the main reason why their children dropped out. They also stated that it is up to their children to decide their future. Poverty and financial difficulties were also the main reasons cited by children as to why they dropped out. They considered education important but when asked if they want to resume their studies, the children responded “no” citing financial constraints.

Although the Poverty Alleviation program is implemented in Dornod aimag, the level of poverty remains the same. Furthermore, the percentage of poor and very poor population is increasing. In a focus group interview with children-respondents, the question was asked as “What do you want now?” Most of the children’s responses were to have warm clothes, shoes, and school stationeries and supplies.

Moreover, the families of these children have low living standards and belong to the vulnerable social group of population, characterized as: large families with many children, unemployed parents, disabled parents, are considered either poor or poorest level, with siblings who have never attended schools. Their physical development, in particular, those of the 14-15 age range, is similar to those of 6-7 years old from normal families. This is attributed to lack of healthy and good food and hard work imposed on their young bodies.

¹⁴ The joint Resolution #34/31 by the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance dated September 2000 defines on its section 1.2 the term ‘vulnerable social groups’ as follows: a family where the head of the family is physically or mentally handicapped, or an extremely poor family.

Most families live with other families in one housing, or rent place to live or, even worse live in sheds or summer huts. A case in point is Mrs. O¹⁵, a citizen of 3rd bagh in Kherlen soum, who lives with other 2 families in a small shed of 3 x 2. There were 13 members composing three families, with two drop outs aged 17 and 21 sharing the same shed.

Most of the children from poor families are embarrassed to go to schools without proper clothes. More importantly, they have to work to help their poor families to earn money for food and heating. Some poor families are known to get used to depend upon the support of others and do not want to exert extra effort to improve their current situation. They explained that the government does not subsidize poor families and hence their children cannot go to school. Poor families in the aimag get support and provisions in kind, such as school stationeries and school supply. However, some families do not use these according to their intended purpose and sell it back to others. In Dornod, 60-70% of the population is poor and out of this number 40% is considered very poor in every soum.

Results of the survey in Dornod also showed that almost every school drop-out child's parents are unemployed. Parents who had some work to do engaged in the sale of meat for someone or sell bags, collect metal waste, transport waste, or do some seasonal contractual building jobs or look after livestock for other families. The aimag's borders are open in January, April, July, and October for 20 days each. During these periods there is opportunity to transport and sell metal waste for a minor price. Reasons for higher rate of unemployment were noted, such as: education level is low, lack of job placement and lack of motivation.

Most of the unemployed population relies on higher authorities. Although the average soum's population is at most 2000, there are only fewer than 10 people who have higher education. Employment rate for population with lower or upper education level is very low and even with their education most of them are engaged in private household business or look after livestock.

In all the soums covered in the survey done in Khovd, poverty was also cited as the number one reason why children drop out from school. Most families have very small herds and do not generate enough income to afford sending their children to school. This is exacerbated by the fact that such families have, on the average, 8-11 members. Poverty-related issues as not having money to afford clothes, school supplies, and transportation surface as a consequence.

¹⁵ For confidentiality and privacy purposes, identities of respondents are not disclosed.

A case in point is Mankham soum where the soum director, Kh. Batbataar explained in an interview, that of 1,000 students, 80 dropped out as of January 2004. Of these 80, 40-50 belong to poor families with small herds. Although they wanted to continue their studies, they were forced to drop out simply because their parents could not afford to continue sending them to school. The children ended up helping in taking care of the families' livestock or gather firewood. The rest belonged to families with more or less bigger herds but, they only get to finish from grade 1, 2 or 3 since they were withdrawn from attending school by their parents to help in livestock breeding.

Kh. Batbataar also noted that the children in Mankham soum are eager to study and there are hardly any children who do not want to study, possibly 1 or 2 out of 80. There are no children who stopped attending their studies and dropped out of their schools because of health problems. Only few children who dropped out of secondary classes returned to resume their studies because most of them have to earn or help their families earn a living.

In Uvurkhangai, poverty was also reported as the main reason behind school drop out. As per the school records in Zuunbayan-Ulaan soum, 60% of school children drop out because of harsh living conditions. As well, almost every respondent cited poverty as the main reason why children drop out. As noted, all aimags reported that poverty is the number one reason why children drop out from school especially from the parents' point of view (see Table 6) .

TABLE 6. Reasons Why Children Drop Out in Aimags Covered by the Study

Reasons	Ulaanbaatar		Uvurkhangai		Khovd		Dornod		Dornogobi	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
poverty/low income/ couldn't buy school supplies/clothing	13	62.4	15	64.5	11	48.4	6	28.8	12	54
herd livestock/work/ /look after younger siblings			3	12.9	5	22	6	28.8	4	18
dormitory/boarding difficulties/homeless, homesick	6	28.8	2	8.6	5	22	2	9.6	6	27
Migration	2	9.6	3	12.9	2	8.8	1	4.8	1	4.5
teacher discrimination/bad relation with teacher	3	14.4	11	47.3	1	4.4	2	9.6	6	27
Not interested to study in school			3	12.9	4	17.6	5	24	1	4.5
physically/mentally disabled	2	9.6	2	8.6	8	35.2	4	19.2	3	13.5
didn't pass the exams/ poor school performance	1	4.8	9	38.7	4	17.6	1	4.8	3	13.5
parents sick/used to drink	1	4.8	2	8.6	4	17.6	1	4.8	1	4.5
Other: to become a lama									1	4.5

Within the frame of the field study, an attempt to define economic status of households with school dropouts was also made in Uvurkhangai. The study revealed that these children mostly lived in large families without any stable income; some households had single parent income in form of pension or allowances and some households with fewer numbers of livestock (less than 20 heads). The biggest size of family was 13, with 11 children, five of whom are drop outs. The mean value of the number of children is 4.2.

In autumn, these households have opportunities to earn by logging timber, sawing and cutting tree logs, soil digging work, or sewing Mongolian traditional clothing and looking after livestock for. As one of the parents explained:

We have six children and four of from them are school age children. However, they do not go to schools, the eldest two of them used to go to school but had to leave it. The other two children have never attended schools. We do not have any financial ability to support them. We have only three heads livestock. We do not have any chance to find any job to improve our family budget. Indeed our relatives are helping us to survive at current stage. How can we afford to send our children to school when the family has monthly income of 9000 tugrug issued by the Government for taking care of our youngest girl? *From an interview with a father, whose children left schools.*

A father whose children never attended schools also reported that:

Two of my sons have allowances for loosing of (sic) their mother. This money could be spent for their school expenses, but I have not (sic) any other income, so this allowance helps us to buy food and other goods.

There were many households who have the same living conditions in Uvurkhangai who cannot afford school expense. Thus, these families prefer to take their children from school or even not let them go to schools since they do not have enough money to pay for school's expenses and supplies as schoolbags, pens, pencils and any other additional payment demanded from schools' administrations. Intricately related to the issue of poverty is parental unemployment. The survey also revealed that almost all of the parents of drop out children are unemployed (see Table 7). Some parents who have some work to do are engaged in sale of meat for someone or sale of bags, collect metal waste, transport of waste, have seasonal contracted building works or look after livestock for other families.

TABLE 7. Parental Employment

Parental employment	Fathers' Employment		Mothers' employment	
	N	%	N	%
herder	39	20.2	41	21.8
small business	13	7.1	26	13.4
skilled worker	13	7.1	9	5.0
unskilled worker	14	7.6	12	6.7
state service	3	1.7	2	0.8
retired	2	0.8	2	0.8
unemployed	104	55.4	96	51.3
Total	188	100	188	100

4.4.1.2. Child labor

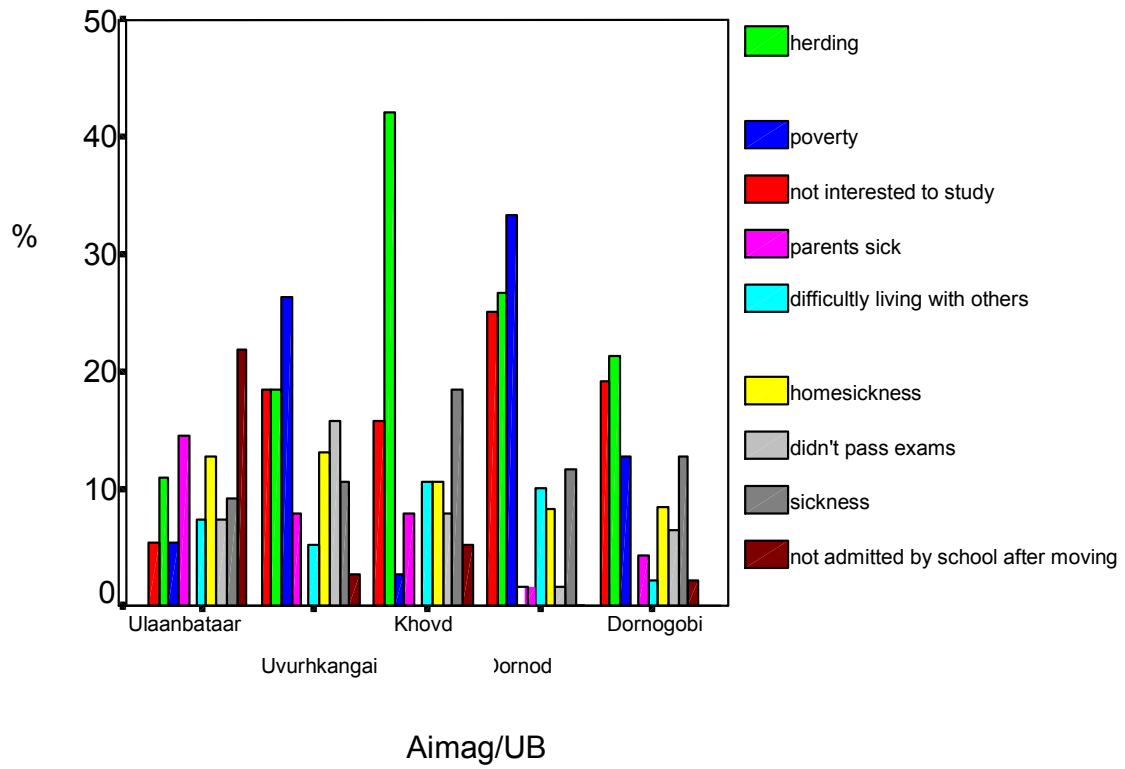
The results also showed that the stark reality of poverty as the root cause of drop out branches out to the issue of child labor. Most parents pull their children out from studying primarily because of financial difficulties, and consequently in order that they can help tend the families' herd and earn a living by selling scrap metals or what not.

Most of the families in the soums covered in the study withdrew their children from school to help in herding regardless of the size of the herd the families have except in Buyant soum where parents made their children drop out so they could help take care of the families' large herds. Both drop out children and those who never enrolled point to herding as the reason why they either quit or never enrolled (see Table 8 and Figure 2).

TABLE 8. Reasons For Never Attending School

Reasons why child never did enroll		N	%
Valid	herding	14	35.9
	sickness	4	10.3
	poor living conditions/standards	13	33.3
	migration	1	2.6
	parents didn't allow	2	5.1
	looked after younger siblings	4	10.3
	do not know	1	2.6
	Total	39	100.0

Figure 2. Comparative Children's Response on Reasons For Dropping Out Per Aimag

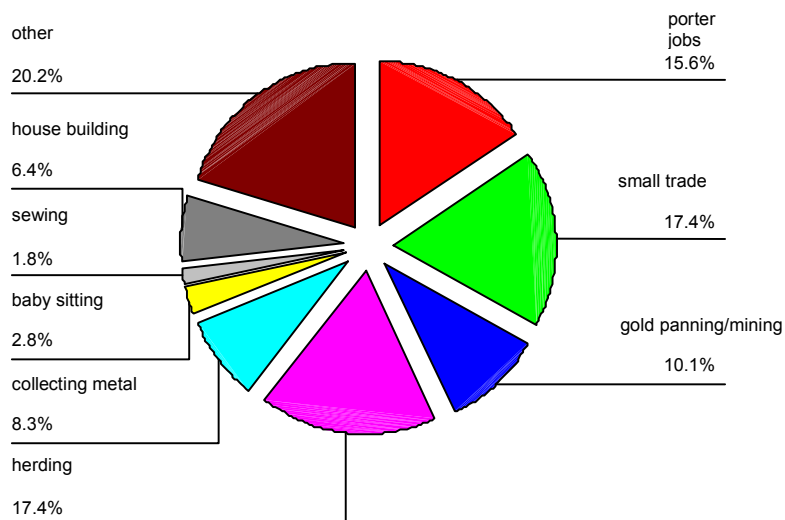


The study also revealed that are two general categories of child labor: work for money and unpaid labor. In the rural areas, herding is not considered as working for money. The kinds of work both drop out and at-risk children, which they do for money, are presented in Figure 3 and Table 9, respectively. As shown, porter jobs and engaging in small trade or hawking are the most popular jobs for both groups of children.

TABLE 9. Kinds of Jobs At-Risk Children Do

Kind of work	N	%
NA /not working/	50	73.5
Porter	6	8.8
selling small goods	4	5.9
mining gold	4	5.9
herd livestock	1	1.5
gathering iron	2	2.9
Sewing	1	1.5
Total	68	100.0

Figure 3. Kinds of Jobs Drop Out Children Do



In Uvurkhangai child labor was also reported as another main reason why children drop out. The study revealed the following factors leading to child labor:

- Children who do not have success in the schools help their households by working. Thus, these children have to drop out from schools and help their households to earn money to cover expenses for their siblings. An interview with a child who works in Uyanga soum explained thus:

Many children who work in gold mines do this job because they have to help their families to bear tuition fees of their brothers and sisters. Sadly only this child has to quit going to school, but other children of family are able to have study even in higher education institutions.

- Households who have family business who do not have a large working force have to rely on their elder children to run the family business. Some families with large livestock even have to live separately. The eldest children stay in the farms while the parents live at home to take care of the family. Thus, these children have to quit school. This is also true in families without parents where the children drop out to work and help their grandparents in making a living. An interview with a grandmother in Zuunbayan-Ulaan soum noted that:

We are too old to keep our large livestock and we cannot do it without the help of this child. Thus, he has to drop out from his school to help us.

- The absence of a family member who was playing a main role in providing for the family forced children to drop out from school to work and earn money. This is especially true with the oldest children who have to take over the role of the family member who can no longer continue to provide. One teacher in Khujirt soum cited the case of a drop out child and explained that:

His father has been jailed in Kharkhorin and he has to take care after his sick mother and younger brothers. Therefore, he has to drop out of school in order to feed his family. He is looking after other households' livestock now to earn money. He was studying successfully in school. I hope he would be able to come back. *From an interview with one class teacher in Khujirt soum*

- Another reason of school drop outs is part-time or weekend work. At the beginning, a school child works only on weekends then he skips his classes to work on weekdays as well. After that he finds his own friends at work and then he stops to meet his classmates and gives up on his school. A dropped child narrated that:

I used to work for gold mine during weekends, and school holidays. At that time, I had only 1-2 friends. Then I had problems with transportation to school in time then I started to skip my classes. Then I decided to do not go to my school. Initially my parents were disappointed, but then they changed their mind because I really didn't like school. I had many friends

who are same as me: do not go to schools and work in gold mine. I really get used to them and became very close with them. *From the interview with a boy who works at the gold mining pit in Uyanga soum*

4.4.1.3. Migration

Results of the survey also showed that migration is a contributing factor behind drop out. The breakdown of the responses of those who moved is as follows: 23.1% of interviewed parents responded that they moved since 1999; 37.6% children moved from their original residence; 19.7% of moved within the aimag; 15.4% left their province. The primary reasons for moving were poverty and unemployment.

This was particularly true in Dornod aimag, UB and in Erdeneburen soum in Khovd. In Dornod, the study identified two directions of migration: migration to urban areas and migration to rural areas.

4.4.1.3.1. Migration to urban areas

The transition to a market economy had a tremendous impact on the life of the rural population: there were less job opportunities, low productivity in the animal husbandry sector and the domination of the service industry. Thus, to be able to join the labor market, the job hunting rural population migrates to the urban areas. This is the case in Dornod, which has the highest rate of urbanization and population density among other eastern aimags of Mongolia. Nomads who compose 3.6% of the population migrated from remote rural areas and settled in neighboring aimags as Selenge and Sukhbaatar and then to Dornod aimag.

Most of the school drop-outs in this aimag moved from Sukhbaatar aimag. According to 2004 statistics, Sukhbaatar aimag has the highest rate of school drop-outs. Poor families migrate from geographically close aimag with less developed economic and urbanized infrastructure to Dornod.

The study team noted that at the Enlightenment Center of Non-formal education in Khan-Uul Duureg, 11 children moved from Sukhbaatar aimag. All of them could not read and do not know the basic alphabet since they had never attended schools and their parents had nomadic way of living. Their families lost their livestock to dzud (prolonged harsh winter conditions) or other natural disasters and moved to Dornod aimag to search for a better life.

Most of the households which migrated to the aimag's center had similar cases. The transition into new market economy allowed privatizing livestock and most families had 5-10 livestock for living. However, social and economic changes, natural and climate conditions led to loss of cattle and livestock and most families were left with no other means for further survival. Most of the respondents' families changed their lifestyles from 1990-1996 to look after livestock. This holds true even today thus, they continue to migrate to urban settlements.

4.4.1.3.2 .Migration to rural area

The team noted that this migration was due to:

- Small families with large livestock move to the rural area and have their children run their livestock. Other families with no livestock have to work for families with large livestock for 5-10 thousand togrog and take their children off schools to help them make a living. A case in point is what the team witnessed in Bayantumen soum where a mother left a note to the school administration saying: *“Dear Teacher, My son is slow in learning and thus it is impossible to force him to learn. So, I’m taking off my son with me. We live in rural area and look after other’s livestock for living. It’s hard to take my son to the school all the time. Bye.”*
- Households that live 35-50 kms away from the soum’s center and away from each other have troubles to take their children to schools. Lack of place in dormitories, inability of parents to take their children to schools or lack of transportation resulted to parents’ unwillingness to send their children to school. There are occasions when parents “forget” to bring their children back to school who, for one reason or another, have to go back to their families in the middle of a term.

In UB, the team reported that families who migrate to Ulaanbaatar used to need permits to be able to work and/or study in the city. Most of the families, who migrated because of poverty, could not afford the documentation fees, which range from 50,000 tugriks¹⁶ to work and 20,000 to study. As a result, school-age children are not accepted in city schools and end up dropping. These children are also considered to increase the number of children per class and add to the increasing loads of teachers. Although the fees were rescinded in 2003, the team found out that most rural migrants still find it hard

¹⁶ Tugriks – Mongolian currency, February 2005 exchange rate: 1\$ = 1,210 tugriks; also called togrogs or tugrugs.

to be registered in UB because of the bureaucratic requirements they have to complete. Thus, people who move from the countryside to the cities usually illegally settle in suburb districts of Ulaanbaatar and end up without any stable source of income and live in very poor living conditions sans any water, power and sanitation facilities. There are no administrative regulations covering rural migrants, especially children. Despite all these, however, urban migration continues to increase.

In Erdeneburen soum, migration was also reported as to have affected drop out rate as a result of families moving to other areas to look for warmer places.

4.4. 1.3 3. Nomadic lifestyle and remote distance between home and school

The teams also noted how nomadic lifestyle is in conflict with settled schooling. Nomadic parents put a lot of efforts for the education of their children: starting from searching a boarding place and looking for transportation to get in and take their children from school for vacation.

Half of the interviewed dropped out children used to live, on the average, more than 10 kms away from the school: 56% used to go to school by walking; 12.2% by car; 3% by riding a horse or camel; 2% by motorcycle; and the rest did not respond. The farthest area some of them come from was 130 kms along the Gobi desert sands. If there was no boarding place available some parents prefer to take children off school. Generally, parents ask relatives or other people, who live in settlements take their child for boarding. If a family has many children, one of the parents or grandparents would live with the children, while the others stay home to look after the family's herd and the other children. The situation is taxing for both sides thus, when parents see their child not performing well in school, they decide not to invest time and money for his/her bad performance and pull the child out from school. Parents believe that the child would be better off helping in herding. This was especially true in Khovd, (a mountainous area) where herding is the second most common reason why children drop out, and Dornogobi, where its remote districts are dispersed around the Gobi deserts.

4.4.1.4. Lack of dormitories

The survey also revealed that the matter of lack of dormitories is a major reason why children drop out especially in the case of Buyant Soum. Buyant Soum is located 25 kms away from Khovd aimag. Twenty percent of the student population are Kazaks; 5 baghs comprise the soum. From a total of 845 school-aged children, 31 are drop outs. 301 attend the schools in the aimag since they live closer to the aimag.

Because of its proximity to the aimag, Buyant soum is the most developed among all the soums in Khovd aimag. As a result, there is also a high incidence of school transfer leading to a lack of dormitory space. Although the dormitory capacity is only for 80 children, 95 children were living there at the time this study was conducted.

The lack of dormitories was also one of the biggest problems in Mankham. According to school director, Kh. Batbaatar, the soum dormitory has a capacity of 70 students but 150-160 stay there as of to date. Others who could not be squeezed in are turned away and they eventually drop out.

As noted in the review of literature (see 1.7), the issue on lack of dormitories is traced back to the boarding school system Mongolia had prior to the transition period wherein dormitories were open to all, serving all students whether rich or poor. When the transition set in, however, attended by consequent crises, economic and otherwise, one of those directly affected was the boarding school system, which suffered from lack of funding. Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2005) explain that the government responded by shutting down completely or partially using the boarding schools that were due for major repair during the first half of the 1990s; and from 1996-2000, imposed the “Meat Requirement” policy, which required parents of boarders to pay for meals. The Meat Requirement provided that a family had to pay for 70 kg of meat per child a year (equivalent to two or three sheep), an amount beyond the means of low-income herder families and eventually resulted to many poor school-aged children to drop out.

As Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe (2005) discuss, before the transition the dormitories served both rich and poor students but, when they became financially strapped because of the ensuing economic crisis, the maintenance of the dormitories suffered. Thus, they ended up dilapidated, with not enough heating and with poor hygienic conditions. As a result, those parents who could afford it pulled out their children from the dormitories and had them settled in apartments they either rent or own; those who did not have the means but, had relatives living near the schools had their children live temporarily with said relatives, while those who did not have means and no relatives with whom their children could stay simply pulled out their children from school.

4.4.1.5 Teacher Discrimination

One of the other causes of school drop-outs that emerged from this survey, specifically from the interviews, is the influence of schools and teachers. Based on the responses, children cited teacher’s

behavior, such as punishing and criticizing pupils for low scores or inferior work, put off children and they consequently stop to go to school. Aside from this, a shortage of textbook was also reported as a reason for losing interest in further learning by school children. For instance, in one class of 22 pupils in Matad soum's, Dornod aimag, the secondary school had only 11 textbooks on one subject. This means that two kids have to share one subject's textbook all the time.

In Jargalan soum, Khovd aimag, social worker Yanjinsren noted that poor children from the countryside trying to get in to secondary education drop out because teachers refuse to accept them claiming that they do not meet the "new criteria" of having to know how to read and write. She also cites cases where some teachers discriminate against children who live in gers in favor of those who live in apartments. The same teacher discrimination was also reported by the teams from Dornogobi and Uvurkhangai and UB.

4.4.1.6. Systemic problems about the Mongolian educational system

The survey also revealed the following systemic problems about the Mongolian educational system.

4.4.1.6.1. Teachers' salaries and loads as they relate to poor performing students who eventually drop out

According to the results of the UB survey, starting in 2005, the four districts in UB covered in the study are mandated to enroll children from their districts as soon as they reach the age of seven. Any child who is absent without any reasons for two weeks, commits a crime, or receives unsatisfied marks during three academic semesters is expelled.

The schools included in the survey have satisfying attendance, overall. Each class averages 35-42 students each. One school had a total from 2,000 - 3,000. Teachers' load is very high, especially in primary classes, and it is impossible for teachers to work with each student (see Table 10 and Table 11).

**TABLE 10. Number of Children Per Class By Level and Type of School Per Aimag/City
Cross-Tabulation given by % of Total**

City / Aimag	Level of class and type of school	Number of children in class on January, 2005				Total
		lowest to 20	21-30	31-40	41- highest	
Ulaanbaatar	Primary	8.3%		16.7%	8.3%	33.3%
	Secondary school	8.3%	16.7%			25.0%
	Non formal	8.3%	25.0%		8.3%	41.7%
	Total	25.0%	41.7%	16.7%	16.7%	100.0%
Uwurkhangai	Primary	25.0%	8.3%	50.0%	8.3%	91.7%
	Secondary school				8.3%	8.3%
	Total	25.0%	8.3%	50.0%	16.7%	100.0%
Khovd	Primary		28.6%	57.1%		85.7%
	Secondary school		14.3%			14.3%
	Total		42.9%	57.1%		100.0%
Dornod	Primary	11.1%	66.7%	11.1%		88.9%
	Secondary school			11.1%		11.1%
	Total	11.1%	66.7%	22.2%		100.0%
Dornogobi	Primary	21.4%	7.1%	28.6%		57.1%
	Secondary school	7.1%	21.4%			28.6%
	Non formal	7.1%	7.1%			14.3%
	Total	35.7%	35.7%	28.6%		100.0%

TABLE 11. Cross –Tabulation on Numbers of Children in Class by Grade Level

Type of class and school	number of children in class on January, 2005				Total
	lowest to 20	21-30	31-40	41- highest	
primary	21.6%	27.0%	45.9%	5.4%	100.0%
secondary school	20.0%	60.0%	10.0%	10.0%	100.0%
non formal	28.6%	57.1%		14.3%	100.0%
Total	22.2%	37.0%	33.3%	7.4%	100.0%

As well, the study found out about the size of classes or loads of teachers (see Table 12). On the average, there were from 35-40 pupils in UB and 24-35 pupils in class in countryside. The highest was 53 children in one class, which was in UB.

TABLE 12. Class Loads of Teachers

Number Statistic	number of children in class on May, 2004		number of children in class on September, 2004		number of children in class on January, 2005	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
lowest to 20	22	40.7%	12	22.2%	12	22.2%
21-30	13	24.1%	17	31.5%	20	37.0%
31-40	17	31.5%	21	38.9%	18	33.3%
40 and highest	2	3.7%	4	7.4%	4	7.4%

Based on the interviews with teachers, the results also noted that the net amount of salaries teachers receive was directly influenced by such factors as how many children in their classes drop out from schools, how many pupils get a failing (F) mark, how successfully they involve their pupils in the lessons' activities, and how creative teachers are, among other criteria.

On one hand, this policy was noted to be enforced in order to raise the responsibilities of the teachers and increase their professional awareness of daily school life; on the other hand, for teachers with a lot of teaching load, this was deemed unfair. As one of the teacher-respondents from Songino Khaikhan District explained, *“children miss their lessons without any reasons and even without informing us about doing so. They miss lessons for many days and then they have to catch up. I do not have any extra time to work with such children. Furthermore, the child gets behind and gets F marks frequently. Some children are so slow in learning. They do not remember things. I do not have any time to work with such children as well. As a result, children start getting F marks. Consequently, my salary is diminished (sic). In addition, it is not a secret that many teachers are frustrated with these children and with school's (sic) administration; as a result they try not to have such children in their classes.”*

Since there was no empirical data to support the teachers' claims as to their salaries, the study could only deduced that teachers' salaries are negatively affected by F marks of students. The study also noted another area of concern raised by the Chingeltei district head on the need to re-define specific criteria to determine teachers' salary and to decrease teachers' teaching load. Also, the provisions of the Education Law and legislations, which mandate that schools should accept children from any districts regardless of the fact that schools could not accommodate children coming from their own districts, let alone those who are from other districts are unrealistic.

4.4.1.6.2. Pre-school education and drop outs

This issue was addressed in an interview with Mr. Erdenesuren, Member of the Parliament, and Chairperson of committee of Education, Culture and Science, who noted that the new law about the mandatory schooling of children who reach seven years of age in 2005 poses problems especially for herdsmen. This is because, in the first place, herdsmen have difficulty sending their children to pre-school and do not want their children to study at such early ages since most of them do not have relatives with whom they could stay.

The same observations were reported from Dornod where the team noted that the fact that most of these children or 90 percent of school drop-outs have entered school when they are 9-10 with no basic preparation to primary education make them primary candidates to drop out because their lack of preparation make them lag behind from their classmates and eventually they drop out.

4.4.1.6.3. Quality of instruction, curriculum evaluation and opportunities for teachers to get higher professional qualification

The results of the study also revealed that there is a big difference between city and country with regards to quality of instruction study. Children who transfer from the country and are lucky to get into city schools get satisfying marks on basic lessons but they lag behind other children especially, on language lessons. Inexperienced teachers are not always able to cope with underperforming students. The study noted the need for continuous professional development for teachers.

According to Mr. Erdenesuren, there is a need to create new educational standard that will make schools interesting places to study. Schools curriculums must be changed radically instead of giving pure theoretical knowledge to children practical knowledge must be included in schools' curriculum as well. The main challenge of the educational system today is to make it more practical in incorporating real life demands with study. Secondary schools should be connected with professional trainings as well. The Educational Law reformed in 2002, states that secondary schools should give some basic professional knowledge to pupils. It means that education should be connected with productivity in order that students will obtain some certain professional practical knowledge. There is very little opportunity for teachers to acquire higher qualification and develop further. Participants of the interviews of this study reported that there is no policy regarding the teachers' qualifications, and there is nothing done in this direction.

In Dornod, teacher respondents commented that the curriculum of the secondary education is more informative rather than practical. Although it is stated that the education system is now student-centered, there is a lack of offering on practical know-how and incomplete implementation of this new system in the rural areas. This is worsened by the lack of teachers, retraining program (almost nil), shortage of textbooks and teaching/instructing guidelines, deficiency in technical facilities and equipment and lack of common and accepted teaching methodology and standards.

The curriculum used in training program was also reported as too complicated for children and the way to assess children's work is too tough. For instance, children from nomadic families in primary school without preschool education cannot even properly draw a line and it is hard to require them to write letter "A" clearly. According to accepted assessment system a teacher demands and makes pupils write clearly and consistently. As one of the teachers interviewed explained, "*We need to change an assessment system for primary school pupils. There are too many criteria of evaluation that require a lot of hard work from kids. One of them is calligraphic writing. However, in countries that we are trying to follow, such as USA, letter "A" is taught as "A" to be memorized. Therefore, a child learns this letter till the end of study. And it doesn't matter the way of writing, but the meaning*" (sic).

Most of the school drop-outs who responded in this survey did not have pre-school education. It is acknowledged however, that education from the age of 4-7 significantly (70 per cent) influences the further development of a person. Therefore, these school drop-outs face troubles in learning when compared to other children who attended pre-school education. They have to catch up with knowledge that they should have received in pre-school education program. They have slow ability to comprehend and become less interested in learning and consequently quit school.

4.4.2. Understudied Areas

4.4.2.1. Physical or mental disabilities

The team from Uvurkhangaï reported that the matter of physical and mental disabilities is an unaddressed issue especially in the rural areas simply because of the absence of services on the improvement and care of children with development disabilities. In Uvurkhangaï and other rural areas, children who have different physical development disabilities do not have the right to get free basic education. Only in the aimag's center is this issue considered and children with minor disabilities are admitted to schools. However, other soums totally ignore such children. Even non-formal education training programs do not involve these children. From all the soums in Uvurkhangaï, it was only in Zuunbayan-Ulaan where there was a registered case of admittance of one deaf child in a school.

In Uvurkhangaï, many of school dropouts had to leave their school because of their disabilities. The records show that most of the disabled children had mental problems. Strictly speaking however, this disability does not mean a physiological mental disability but, is also extended to problems with socialization or difficulty living with others

It is also mistakenly factored in on how school children are assessed. Many children with communication skills problems or children who do not attend pre-school education program often face problems catching up with the school's curriculum. Unfortunately, the tendency is for teachers, parents and other schoolchildren to consider such poor children as mentally disabled. Since teachers are not willing to keep such children in their class and parents do not want to spend more money for their "brainless" children, these children are forced to drop out from their schools.

In Erdeneburen soum, KKhovd aimag, physical and mental disabilities also figured as common reasons on why children drop out. As of May 2004, there were 13 children who dropped out, 6 of which are disabled children. According to school director Erdenee, parents of these children think that since their children are not able to learn it is better for them just to breed cattle.

4.4.2.2. Lack of communication and socialization skills

The team from Dornod reported that among school drop-outs and those who have never attended schools, there are a few children with mental disabilities. There are also those who have slow mental and thinking abilities and lack speaking skills, are introverted, narrow-minded, and timid. The main cause of such behavior is attributed to the fact that they have very limited opportunities to communicate outside their own family members and they have only restricted occasion to hear others through radio broadcasting when they look after their livestock. They do not talk much and sometimes they do not even know how to talk with their own parents. They only hear their parents' commands as "wake up," "eat food", "go to bed" and rarely, words such as "the cost of meat is...", "look after your younger ones" and "do not play much". From childhood these are all the words they hear. When they become 14-15 years old, they can attend non-formal education and learn basic education and literacy. Otherwise, they are expected to live this way through their life, marry and have children with similar childhood conditions and relationship with their offspring. This living style has become a vicious cycle. Instructors of non-formal education describe this type of children as "children with closed ears" or children with lack of skills to listen to others.

4.4.2.3. Bullying/peer discrimination

The results also showed that children drop out because they are bullied or discriminated by their own classmates. This is directly related to their being poor and do not have the money to contribute to class activities. They usually do not have anything to eat at home. Some teachers and other students

do not understand this and they comment about these children as children who pull the whole class back by not contributing to the class activities. These poor children are met with hostile attitude by their teachers and classmates. They become ashamed of themselves, are embarrassed in front of their classmates and teachers, thus they start to miss their lessons and eventually drop out

The almost institutionalized and accepted practice of collecting money from students for one reason or another is also another systemic problem in the Mongolian educational system revealed in the study.

4.4.2.4. Educational level of parents

The study also revealed that the educational level of parents contributes to a child's dropping out of school. Most of the drop out children's parents are either uneducated or have primary or lower secondary educational background as shown on Table 13.

TABLE 13. Educational Level of Parents of Drop Out Children

Educational level of parents	Father's education		Mother's education	
	N	%	N	%
uneducated	4	4.6	6	6.3
primary	14	15.5	12	13.0
lower secondary	16	17.6	29	31.5
secondary	21	22.3	21	23.1
college	7	7.1	7	7.6
BA	3	3.8	4	4.2
no response	27	29.0	13	14.3
Total	92	100	92	100

In Dornod, it is estimated that 51.7% of parents from drop-out children have incomplete basic education and 14.8% have no education at all. Most of the respondents come from single-parent families or their parents are either uneducated or have primary or lower secondary educational background. Even in families with adequate education background children live with divorced or separated parents or live with relative's families who are also uneducated or are poorly educated. It was observed by the team that uneducated parents will raise uneducated children. As a result, children of uneducated parents are not concerned about their children's schooling and do not care about teaching their children or help them in their study.

The same observations were also reported by the team from Dornogobi.

4.4.3. Attitude Towards Education and Drop Out

Besides the statistics on drop out and the reasons of its occurrence, the study also involved an investigation on affect and attitude towards education. The results are as follows:

4.4.4. Attitude Towards Education

The survey showed that the dropout children themselves and their parents value education highly. Eighty four percent of parents and 73 % of children regarded education essential for the future (see Table 14) while 82% wanted to give their children education even if they do not have the means (see Table 15). Sixty four percent of the dropped out children expressed desire to continue to study (see Table 16). It was noted that during the transition period, most parents lost their belief in education and started withdrawing their children from school although traditionally, Mongolians valued education highly. The results from the survey showed, however, that most parents now regard education crucial to their children's future and would like to send their children to school regardless of whether they have the means or not.

TABLE 14. Parents' and Children's Attitude Toward Education

Believe that education is essential for the future				
Answers	Children		Parents	
	N	%	N	%
yes	137	73.1	78	83.8
no	14	7.2	3	3.4
don't know	24	13.0	10	11.1
no response	13	6.7	1	1.7
Total	188	100	92	100

TABLE 15. Parents' Response on Whether They Would Like To Give Education to Their Children

Desire to give education	Parents	
	N	%
Will educate in any case	39	42.7
Will try to give education	25	27.4
would like to educate, but has no means	11	12.0
let child decide	6	6.0
Will not educate	5	5.1
Don't know	1	1.7
no response	5	5.1
Total	92	100

TABLE 16. Children's Response on Whether They Would Like to Continue to Study

Desire to study in school	Children	
	N	%
Yes	122	64.7
yes, but nobody will admit	19	10.1
No	28	14.7
don't know	10	5.5
no response	9	5.0
Total	188	100

4.4.5. Drop Out Children Attitude Towards Being A Drop Out

During the fieldwork, the Dornogobi team observed that dropouts did not like to be called or call themselves drop outs and neither did their parents. They preferred to be called 'school leavers', avoiding the use of the word 'drop out'. The team also noted the stigma children associate with the word "drop out" as though it meant someone who is "out." Response to the question on whether they felt sorry for dropping out revealed that 44% of them always did, while 33% responded "sometimes", indicating that two thirds of the respondents did not want to drop out, or did not do so out of their own free will (see Table 17).

TABLE 17. Responses on Whether Drop Out Children Feel Sorry for Dropping Out

Do you feel sorry for dropping out?	N	%
yes, always	83	44.1
Sometimes	62	32.8
no, never	35	18.5
no response	8	4.6

As the team noted, these results show that children drop out of school not because of lack interest or they do not want to study. An interview with a drop out child underscores this: "*Being (sic) dropout is a shame. I (sic) always afraid that people would discover, that I couldn't read and write. I don't like to correspond to school children (sic).*"

4.4.6. Gender Issue: Boys Drop Out

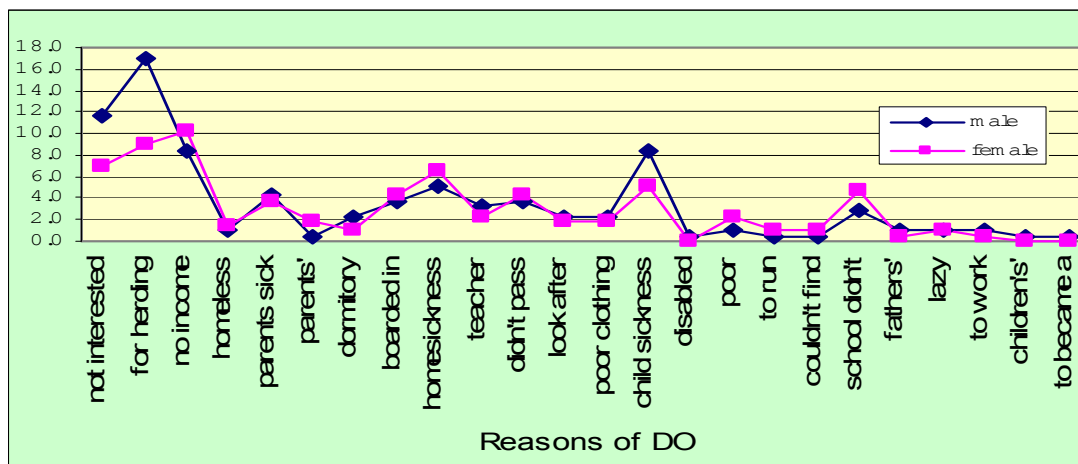
The results of the study also showed that gender plays a big part on why children drop out or why they never go to school. Results from the survey indicated that more boys never attended school or had to drop out since they had to herd (71.4%) and need to work to help the family (61.5%) (see Table 18 and Figure 4). The lack of means of family subsistence had a more direct effect on boys than girls.

The main reason why girls drop out or never attend school was because of sickness (75%).

TABLE 18. Comparative Reasons Why Boys and Girls Never Enrolled

Reasons	Gender				Total
	Male		Female		
	N	%	N	%	
herding	10	71.4	4	28.6	100
need to work	8	61.5	5	38.5	100
sickness	1	25.0	3	75.0	100
need to look after younger siblings	2	50.0	2	50.0	100
parents didn't allow	1	50.0	1	50.0	100

FIGURE 4. Comparative Reasons Why Boys and Girls Drop Out



From the interviews conducted by the team in Uvurkhangai, the team gathered that boys drop out from school in order to work and support their families. Parents consider them as a “working force” to help the family especially, because the kind of work they do such as looking after cattle and livestock, carrying baggage for fee, selling goods, gold panning and land digging earn more money; girls, on the other hand, sell home-made food like dumplings and bouses¹⁷ and engage in small retailing. Some of the boys who work in a gold mining pit in Uvurkhangai had this to say, “*girls can only work in a gold washing section in the gold mining pit, however, in winter time they do not work much. On the other hand we do all works, such as mining, lift ground from the hole, washing (sic).*”

Girls are also regarded as more sensitive to any kind of pressure and violence and it is better for them to stay in school. According to one mother, the dropping out of girls increases the probability of their

becoming pregnant. Thus, education is a kind of support mechanism and protection for girls. The team also noted that girls do not quit schools to earn money but let parents, mostly mothers, to work. However, they take care of their younger sisters or brothers or other family members especially, those with physical disabilities. An interview with a relative explained:

This is a daughter of my sister. She drops out of school, because she has to take care for (sic) her sick grandfather. In this family only me who have (sic) job and earn money, so I cannot quit from my job. Her mother has married again and now lives with her new family as herders. I cannot take this girl to a school because I cannot afford to have a sitter for my father. *From an interview with aunt of school dropout girl by methodologists of non-formal training program*

4.4.7. Decreasing Trend on the Drop Out Rate in Mongolia (or not)

As of October 2004, the total rate of drop out in Mongolia was reported to be 19,388 (see Table 19). As of 2003 (see Figure 5), the total rate was reported to be 17,671.

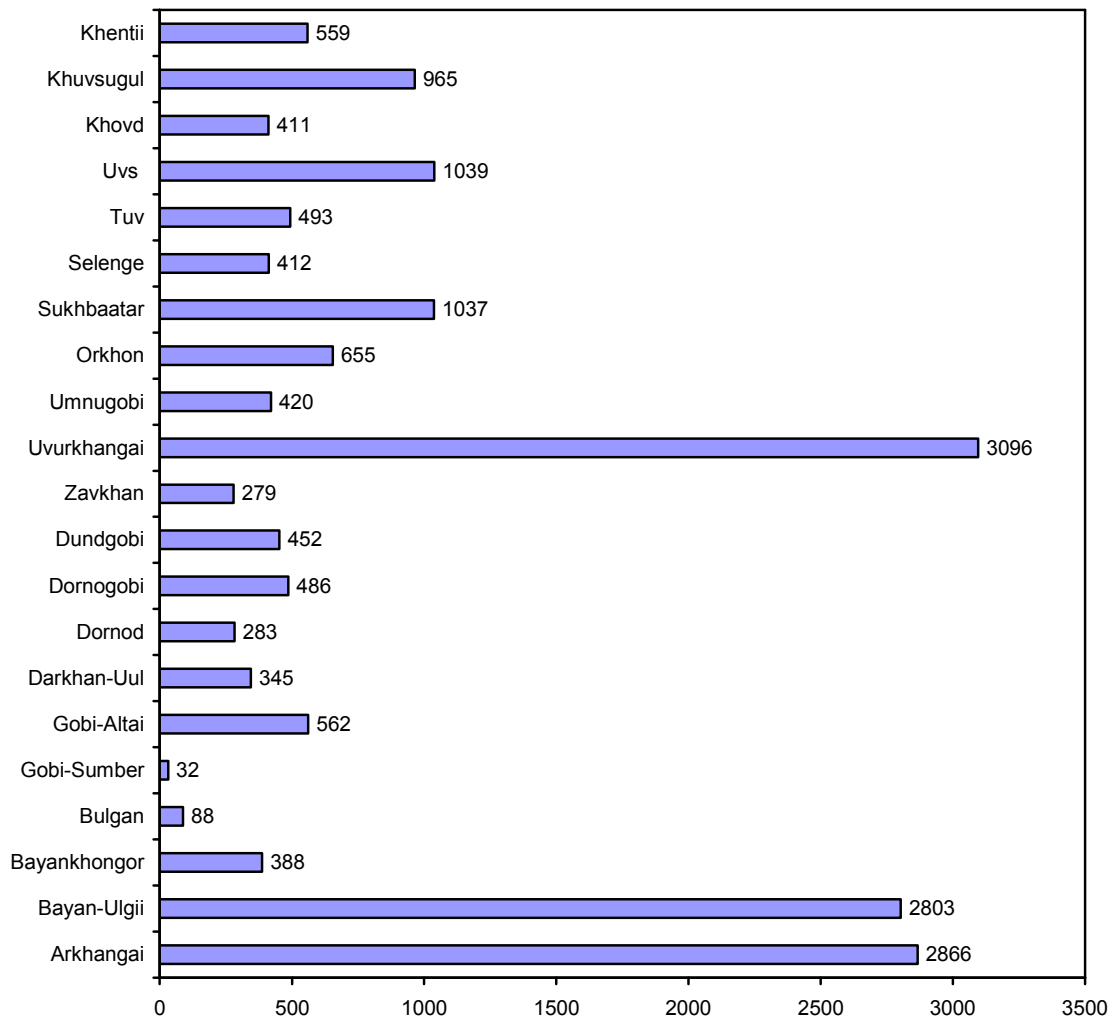
TABLE 19. Drop out Rate for Mongolia as of October 2004¹⁸

	Aimags/province or district	Dropout (N)
1	Arkhangai	2420
2	Uvurkhangai	3079
3	Darkhan-Uul	717
4	Bayankhongor	1005
5	Gobisumber	39
6	Bulgan	118
7	Selenge	702
8	Uvs	1116
9	Khuvsgul	882
10	Dundgobi	495
11	Sukhbaatar	951
12	Bayan-Ulgii	3096
13	Khovd	616
14	Umnugobi	327
15	Orkhon	301
16	Dornogobi	304
17	Gobi-Altai	450
18	Khentii	274
19	Zavkhan	231
20	Dornod	557
21	Tuv	475
22	Ulaanbaatar	Songino-Khairkhan district 270
23	Capital	Bayangol district 96
24		Baganuur district 76
25		Chingeltei district 176
26		Sukhbaatar district 170
27		Khan-Uul district 89
28		Nalaikh district 6
29		Bayanzurkh district 350
	Total	19388

¹⁷ Mongolian national dish similar to large steamed sized dumplings.

¹⁸ Source: NFED, 2004

FIGURE 5. Drop Out Rate for Mongolia as of 2003¹⁹



As the 2004 (19,388) and 2003 (17,671) figures show, there was an increase instead of decrease in the overall drop out rate in the whole of Mongolia between from 2003-2004. Although the difference is noted only for one year, when the figures were compared with the 2003-2004 (11953) and 2004-2005(10770) figures (see Table 1), the differences are striking. The team’s analysis of the drop out rate from different agencies for different years revealed that there is no statistical basis for the claim that the drop out rate is decreasing. As noted, available data could not be reconciled. The team could only attribute this to the lack of an official definition of who or what a drop out prior to the implementation of the Education Law of 2002 in January 2005 and the flawed procedure on how drop

¹⁹ Based on National Census figures, 2003.

outs are counted, the inefficient data collection record keeping and handling at the local level. As well, to what Steiner-Khamsi, Stolpe and Amgaabazar (2004) refer to as the “statistical eradication of drop outs,” (p. 85), where statistics on the number of drop outs are officially downplayed when the government finds it expedient to do so.

4.4.8. Mongolian legislations and policies on drop out²⁰

Although there is no explicit legislative enactment that addresses the drop out incidence in Mongolia the following policies are considered to prevent and alleviate the drop out rate in Mongolia. These are:

4.4.8.1. Abolition of the 1995 regulation imposing fees for dormitory admission, which is believed to have contributed in the massive dropout of low-income family children. After 5 years of being imposed, this mandatory parental cost-sharing practice was effectively stopped in 2000. The government took the full responsibility of a hundred percent subsidy for dormitory food expenses budgeted on a per student allocation basis; consequently, the per student expense provided by the government in 2004 increased by 21% as opposed to the 1999 level. In terms of actual tugriks, this meant 86.6 thousand tugriks per student per year in 1999 to 110.9 thousand per student per year in 2004.

4.4.8.2. Direct support for school-aged needy children in the form of free school supplies in the amount of 16,000 tugriks given at the start of each school year. This nationwide program is covered by the September 2000 joint Resolution #34/31 by the Minister of Education and the Minister of Finance declaring that school children coming from vulnerable social groups or belonging to families with four or more children simultaneously studying in general education schools are entitled to receive free schools supplies. In order to receive the supplies parents and guardians/ custodians of eligible children must submit their requests and proof documents to the local government by May to receive free school supplies in September of the same year.²¹.

4.4.8.3. In cooperation with UNESCO, the government established the Non-Formal Educational Development in 1977-2004. This program is implemented based on the following program directions:

- Improving literacy rate of population

²⁰ Source: Amgaabazar, Gherelmaa (2005). op.cit.

²¹ As the Dornod team explained, however, some families do not use the 16,000 tugriks for its intended purpose but instead resell the supplies they receive.

- Improving the general educational level of population
- Re-training of population
- Out-of-school vocational training, professional skill learning, promotion of
- professional and educational level of workers
- Support the creative initiatives of population
- Support the self -learning of population

The said directions form the basic framework of the Non-Formal Education training content. The content of the training programs for NFE facilitators follow the community development model and is based on learner's demands and needs. The NFE central office is in charge of non-formal education teacher training and retraining, curriculum and textbook development and implementation of the equivalency certificate program to out-of-school children. Upon achieving the academic requirements verified by passing the standardized tests children in the NFE program are either transferred to regular schools at the grade level corresponding to their age group or receive the equivalency certificate of the completion of basic education. The final implementation report on the NFE program shows impressive achievements with regard to non-enrollee and dropout targeting activities. Records show that from 2000-2004 the non-formal education system has provided equivalency education to 28,356 students including those currently enrolled.²²

²² Mankham soum director, Kh. Batbaatar however, explains that there is a drawback in informal training in the case of who do not have formal education and do not have sufficient level of knowledge who finish the NFE program are still able to get equivalency certification stating that they obtained secondary higher education.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

5.1. Definitions of Drop Out

The results of the survey reveal that although the MOECS, in compliance with the Education Law of 2002, defines drop outs as children at the age of compulsory basic education (currently 7 through 16) who are not attending school, different parties from parents, children, teachers and local school officials define it as they understand it. The definitions vary from those children who attended school for a period of time and thereafter quit to those who never enrolled or, as in the case of Erdeneburen soum in Khovd and Zuunbayan-Ulaan in Uvurkhangai aimag, which count disabled children as drop outs.

This may be attributed to the fact prior to the Education Law of 2002 there was no explicit official definition of 'drop out'. Results of the team's investigation on what a drop out is from previous records of the MOECS and the National Statistics Office show that indeed, there is no official definition of what or who a drop out is prior to Education Law 2002.

As previously noted, the definition of who or what a drop out is of prime importance as it is the very basis on how drop outs are counted. The core matter of defining who a drop out is bears much significance on how agencies (see Table 3) and the aimags (Table 2) arrive at their figures. But more importantly, it bears a strategic financial significance on how much budget a school would receive for a given academic year. It must be noted that school budgets depend on the headcount of currently enrolled students.

A deeper scrutiny on the importance of defining 'drop out' would reveal that it is also fundamentally linked to the enforcement of compulsory education, which, prior to the 2005 implementation of the Education Law of 2002, required mandatory schooling of school aged children (aged 8-15) for 8 years (4 primary and 4 secondary). However, the enforcement of compulsory education in Mongolia does not carry any weight since there are no penalty clauses provided for non-compliance. As may be obvious, this makes it easy for parents to withdraw their children from school for whatever reason. The matter is exacerbated when one considers the nomadic tradition of most of rural Mongolia and the harsh physical conditions students from the remote baghs and soums have to go through to get to school. As the survey show, these conditions are contributory to parents' decisions to withdraw their children from school especially, when the children are regarded to be slow learners or simply when there is no available dormitory space to accommodate them.

5.2. Registration and Computation of School Drop Outs

Intricately linked to the matter of defining 'drop out' is the registration and counting of school drop outs. The results show serious flaws on the MOECS's method of counting drop outs. From the central office down to the bagh level, errors could be detected. As noted, there is no cross-checking system to determine if a child who transferred actually re-entered a school wherever s/he migrated. As well, as the Uvurkhangai team found out, records are made only for children who live in their home, but those children who live with other families or live with their families temporarily in soums, or those children whose families do not have an official residency in soums are not counted and registered at all.

Attention must also be paid on how records are kept and maintained at some of the soum schools. Evidence of error in and inefficient data collection from some social workers, and flawed record keeping and maintenance were reported in the survey. The question begging to be asked is: if at the very first source of data collection (bagh schools), the data is already questionable, how much of it could be reliable when it finally reaches the central office of the education ministry especially, considering how many steps of the bureaucratic ladder it has to go through. Corollary to this is: if the official method of counting drop out is flawed, how can any data on drop out be relied on?

Undoubtedly, this is one area of the drop out monitoring initiative that needs to be addressed, not only as a matter of policy but also of organizational and procedural systems efficiency. From the practical point of view of data reliability and the political and economic implications of "the politics of statistics on the issue of school drop out" (Steiner-Khamsi , Stolpe and Amgaabazar, 2004, p.85) the method of registering and counting of drop is too important to be left unaddressed.

5.3. Policy Focus Areas: Drop Out Reasons

The results of the survey as to the reasons why children out survey prove the hypotheses of the study. As noted the following are the most common reasons behind the drop out incidence in Mongolia:

5.3.1. Policy Focus Areas

1. Poverty/low income
2. Child-labor related reasons such as herding, need to earn a living to help support the family, and need to take care of siblings or older members of the family
3. Migration
4. Lack of dormitories

5. Teacher discrimination
6. Systemic problems with the education system

5.3.2. Understudied Areas

1. Physical and/or mental disabilities
2. Lack of communication and socialization skills
3. Bullying or peer discrimination
4. Educational level of parents

We categorized the reasons into two: policy group and understudied areas to help bring focus to the kind of measures and action each group of reasons require. Needless to say the reasons under policy areas are the ones we believe demand considered and well-thought of socio-economic policy reforms and actions with particular attention to the drop out issue, the apparent lack of which, brings about the continued occurrence of drop outs.

It goes without saying, as well, that the understudied ones demand careful attention for they are rooted at the very core of the drop out as a person, the drop out child, not as a statistic, but a victim of forces and circumstances which s/he or has no control of.

We concede that the reasons are not at all surprising as they have been pointed out time and again by different studies. Yet, a closer look at the reasons as a whole, however, indicate the mosaic complexity of the drop out issue and how the reasons are so intricately linked it seems almost arbitrary that they could be individually or collectively categorized.

The root cause of poverty, by itself, is already a matter of grave concern. But, it would be naïve to simply recommend that it be eradicated. This does not mean however, that it should not be confronted. As the results show, poverty branches out not only to the second most cited reason of child-labor related reasons of herding, need to make a living and need to take care of other family members; it also transcends and leads to the other reasons. As cited in the team reports, poor parents or families withdraw their children from school since they could not afford school supplies and other expenses, and that they are better off herding or working instead. This is especially true if the child happens to be a slow learner, or has problems communicating or, if the family lives too far and/or is nomadic and the family needs to look for a warmer place in winter.

Other examples gathered from the interviews speak of a child who is so poor s/he cannot afford to contribute money to school activities and is therefore considered as pulling back the class. As a result, s/he is not looked with favor by his/her teachers and even classmates, and starts to be bullied and is treated with hostility. Worse, is because of poverty a child is discriminated outright no less by school administrators or teachers themselves who, results of the study show, favor those who live in apartments rather than in gers, indicating teacher's preference for urban over rural children. The inference is rural children who migrate to the centers are poor performers and need individualized instruction, which a teacher, who is normally overworked and underpaid, has no spare time to do. Since teachers' salaries are reportedly dependent on, among others, the performance of their students, teachers do not want to take the chance of taking children who are at risk or have the potentials to earn a failing grade of "F". As noted, an "F" student means a salary deduction for the teacher. The sad consequence, of course, is children end up dropping out.

The various interview cases highlighting the findings clearly indicate the multilayered interconnectedness of the different reasons behind the drop out incidence: from the educational level of the parents, which influence the eventual academic performance of a child, to a child's own communication and socialization skills, to the way a child is treated by teachers and peers in school, to the way a child gets to school and to the physical availability of a dormitory space or other living accommodations --- all of them, singly and collectively, materially contribute to that very moment when a child finally drops out from school. But, it is not within the scope of this study to find solutions to all the reasons behind a child dropping out thus, we focus on what the study could realistically address in terms of policy reforms at this point in time: the systemic problems with the educational system of Mongolia.

No less than Mr. Erdenesuren, Member of Parliament and Chairperson of Committee of Education, Culture and Science, who is one of the respondents of the UB survey comments on the problems ailing the educational system. Together with other participants, Mr. Erdenesuren, describe such problems, which could be categorized as: pre-school education and drop outs; quality of instruction, curriculum evaluation and opportunities for teachers to get higher professional qualification; and teachers' salaries and loads as they relate to poor performing students who eventually drop out.

On pre-school and drop outs issue, the Education Law of 2002 which mandates the compulsory schooling of children who reach seven years of age in 2004 is reported to pose problems especially for herdsman; this is because, in the first place, herdsman have difficulty sending their children to pre-

school and do not want their children to study at such early ages since most of them do not have relatives with whom their children could stay.

The need to create new educational standard that will make schools interesting places to study is also another area that needs serious investigation. As noted, schools curriculums must be changed radically: instead of giving pure theoretical knowledge to children practical knowledge must be included in schools' curriculum as well. The main challenge of the educational system today is to make it more practical in incorporating real life demands with study. Yet even for teachers themselves, there is very little opportunity to acquire professional practical knowledge, much less higher education and develop further. Yet again, there is no policy regarding the teachers' skills and qualifications, and there is nothing done in this direction.

As previously discussed, the net amount of salaries teachers receive is reportedly directly influenced by the quality of their teaching. Teachers' salaries supposedly depend on such factors as how many children in their classes drop out from schools, how many pupils get a failing (F) mark, how successfully teachers involve their pupils in the lessons' activities, and how creative teachers are, among other criteria. Since teacher's salary is claimed to be affected by the number of children who get F marks, many teachers do not want these weak children in their classes. In addition, teachers do not like children who transfer from non-formal educational system to the formal one. Clearly, this is a big drawback of the Mongolian educational system.

If the Mongolian government is really serious with its educational reform efforts, it should be ready to deal with the above systemic problems within its educational system. By themselves the problems are a matter of serious concern already and given that, as the results of the study show, they have direct bearing on the incidence of drop out in Mongolia, the more it becomes imperative that they be reviewed and addressed immediately.

As for the understudied areas, we call particular attention to the plight of the physically and mentally disabled child. The results show that it is only in the aimags and the cities that there are available services for the disabled and there is nothing of the sort at the rural areas, where given the formidable physical conditions of the countryside, one would logically surmise, they are most needed. Inherently already at a disadvantage the Mongolian disabled children, drop out or not, must be doubly pitied: not only are they not registered or counted in almost all aimags, no provisions are available for them as well.

The apparent institutionalized discrimination by the Mongolian government of the disadvantaged members of its society, manifested from the way rural migrants used to have to pay city fees to avail of basic services, from the way city teachers turn away those who live in gers from city schools, and the way the disabled are not counted on official registries, must be the subject not only of immediate policy reforms; more importantly, it demands a reinvestigation of Mongolia's priorities: as welcoming as it is to foreigners, it is almost unconscionable that it turns its back to its own underprivileged citizenry.

5.4. Legislation and Policies on Drop Out

Although there are policies instituted to alleviate the occurrence of drop out such as the abolition of the dormitory fees, the 16,000 tugriks subsidy for school supplies and the establishment of the non-formal education program there is no explicit and distinct legislative enactment or mandate pertaining to the drop out issue or to its alleviation. There are also no provisions in the Education Law of 2002 or in the Constitution of Mongolia that stipulate who should be responsible and accountable when a child drop outs, much less any penalties ascribed thereto.²³

Undoubtedly, the lack of a national mandate on drop out, which should provide the legal framework and enabling imprimatur on how the drop out issue could be addressed leaves the doors wide open for parents or families or even the children themselves to get out of school. The fact that no party is held accountable and responsible over a child dropping out could only make the matter worse. Not only does the current situation provide the perfect conditions for the unregulated dropping out of children, it also cripples both the letter and the spirit of Mongolia's compulsory education program.

²³ Based on discussions with Amgaabazar, Gherelmaa

6. Policy Recommendations and Indicators

6.1. On the Definition(s) of Drop Out

1. There should be a nationwide information and awareness campaign on who a drop out is in order that standardized procedures could be set up properly identifying 'drop out' and to avoid the current confusion on who a drop out is.
2. The campaign should also focus on the negative impact of drop out on Mongolian society, but more importantly, on the Mongolian child.

6.2. On Registering and Recording Drop Out Rate

1. There should be an exhaustive policy review on the methods and procedures on the counting of drop out with the end view of instituting efficient data collection and record keeping systems and procedures from the bagh level to the central office of the MOECS.
2. There should be an institutionalized check and balance and cross referencing of data sources bearing in mind the political and economic implications of the "politics of the statistics of drop outs" pointed out by Steiner-Khamsi, Stolpe and Amgaabazar (2004).

6.3. On Drop Out Reasons

1. Poverty alleviation measures should be concerted and coordinated to provide sustainable employment opportunities and income generating initiatives especially for the population of rural Mongolia.
2. The drop out issue should be treated as a separate concern, not lumped together with other poverty related issues in order that it would get the necessary government support and attention it deserves including corresponding budgetary appropriation.²⁴
3. Immediate review and reforms should be carried out to address and arrest the systemic problems plaguing the Mongolian educational system, including but not limited, to:
 - 3.1 the review of the mandatory pre-school education provisions
 - 3.2. curriculum standards
 - 3.3. teacher skills and professional development

- 3.4. the policy on teacher's salaries making them contingent on student performance
- 3.5. the prevailing practice of collecting money from students
- 3.6. teacher discrimination
- 3.7. lack of dormitory space

4. Measures should be in place to protect and assist the disabled children.

6.4 On Legislation and Policies

1. There should be a national policy enactment that would provide for the overseeing of the drop out incidence with appropriate penalty provisions and sanctions against those who cause or, are instrumental, in the dropping out of a child from school in order to avert the drop out rate.
2. There should be oversight committees both at the central and local levels to monitor drop out cases in both areas.

6.5. Recommended Indicators on Drop Out

1. Income level /poverty level
2. Prolonged unexcused absences
3. Transfer within the aimag or transfer to other aimag, city.
4. Big family (4 or more children with 1 or 2 children who already dropped out);
5. Working after school
6. High rate of truancy

²⁴ Based on discussions with Amgaabazar, Gherelmaa

7. Limitations of the Study

It is common knowledge in the research community that the quality of any research undertaking is highly dependent on the capability of the researchers and the soundness of its instruments. These two critical components posed limitations to a certain extent on the quality of some of the data collected and, by extension, the results gathered in this research. A couple of researchers, who had no research background, had the mistaken notion that data collection is a numbers game, that is, the more respondents, the better, without reckoning, or even have the capability to reckon what sampling means and why we have sample populations. Thus, there were occasions in some areas when the target number of respondents was not reached, they would try to make up the lacking numbers in other soums. In one aimag, for example, the team report submitted, showed almost double what was required as per sampling.

As well, there was an occasion when two drop out children were being interviewed at the same time, and would have continued until the Research Associate noticed what was going on and immediately intervened. It could be anybody's guess on what happened in the other aimags where some of the teams operated on the belief that data collection is a matter of getting the highest number of responses.

On the matter of the instruments, there were questions that simply could not be asked or had to be rephrased, such as the question to parents asking whether the dropped out child is living with the parent or not, and some of the multiple choice answers were: parents deceased, without parents. The fact that the parent was right there answering the questionnaire totally negates the choices and, for that matter, the question itself. Another was a question to the teacher respondents on what they think is the reason behind the lack of parental attention and one of the choices was lack of parental attention, answering the question with the question itself. Moreover, the question already assumed that there is, in fact, lack of parental attention.

For the most part, the questions that posed problems not only when they were asked but, more importantly, in interpreting how they relate to the incidence of the drop out in Mongolia, were the ones that attempted to draw a psychological profile of the child, which were retained from the Albanian instruments, such as, "do you smoke?", "do you feel upset sometimes?", "do you have nightmares?", "do you have headaches?", and from the Mongolian side, "does anyone in your family drink vodka a lot?"

The questions assumed that engagement in such activities lead one to drop out which, as is obvious is not the case. It does not even have to be pointed out that everybody has headaches, nightmares or feel upset sometimes, regardless if one is a drop out or not; or, if somebody in the family drinks vodka, that this is tantamount to alcoholism. More importantly, not one from the team had the psychological or clinical preparation to be able to draw any inference, much less conclusion, on the materiality of such questions on the drop out issue. Although these questions were not made part of the analysis, they stand to prove some inherent flaws both on the Albanian and Mongolian questionnaires.

Another limitation of the study is the language issue. Indeed, much was probably lost in the translation of the team reports and the quantitative and statistical analyses of data contained in the report. The team reports, which were originally in Mongolian and later on translated to English for the benefit of the Research Associate who was tasked to edit the team reports and write the final report, were literally translated and sometimes hard to comprehend. The translator admitted her own limitations and acknowledged that she was not familiar with the drop out issue and thus translated verbatim sans contextualization. It took a series of revisions and consultations with the team members to understand what truly is trying to be expressed in some of the reports. It must be noted that the Research Associate did not speak Mongolian and the team members had very limited English proficiency.

This was the same case with the quantitative and statistical analyses part of the report. The data analysis was very limited in the first place and when questions were clarified on how some of the figures were arrived at, the explanations proved insufficient. This led to the non-inclusion of some data in the report.

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