

Innovative good practices for inclusive and gender-equitable land governance, land management and landscape development planning in Mongolia

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Key words: pastoralists, land governance, land management, landscape development planning, Mongolia, gender equity

SUMMARY

The WOLTS (Women's Land Tenure Security) Project has been implemented in Mongolia since late 2015. From the start we worked closely with the National Land Agency (ALAMGAC) to amplify efforts to develop inclusive and gender-sensitive land governance tools to address climate-related social and economic challenges facing Mongolian herders, to support implementation of the VGGTs and achievement of the SDGs. Key here is pastureland degradation, resulting in decreased livestock productivity which impacts family livelihoods and social norms and structures. WOLTS promotes participatory engagement in local land governance, with all men and women encouraged to be part of decision-making on land. Along with our efforts to strengthen capacity of locally chosen Gender and Land Champions, this was recognized by ALAMGAC, leading to development of new 'Gender Guidelines' for inclusion in broader national guidelines for local landscape development planning. The WOLTS team worked closely with local herders to develop the new guidelines that were endorsed by ALAMGAC and introduced to over 300 land officers around Mongolia in late 2021 via online training, and in-person to higher-level land officers from every province in late 2022, with WOLTS Champions also taking part in the training to share their experiences with senior government. Initial feedback suggests the guidelines are beginning to be used in practice, with donors supporting additional training in districts undergoing donor-funded landscape planning. The Gender Guidelines support herders to plan for sustainable pastureland management as full and effective participants alongside local leaders, with positive impacts for local land governance. Increasing awareness of the importance of gender-equitable participation in land governance has also strengthened herders' confidence to defend their land rights when these are challenged by mining companies not respecting licensing processes or environmental standards, as demonstrated at a recent successful protest in the capital. The authors show that addressing gender equity, participation and inclusion must be essential parts of successful solutions to managing competing interests in land and need now to be formally adopted in national land planning legislation and rolled out fully across all districts. This will also support security of tenure and access to land for all. The approach taken offers valuable lessons for other pastoral landscapes and beyond.

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INTRODUCTION

It's a pleasure to present something about work I have been involved with developing good practices for inclusive and gender-equitable land governance. This presentation is based on work I have led with Mokoro's grant-funded Women's Land Tenure Security Project (WOLTS) since 2015. The initial goal was to develop an innovative approach to strengthening land governance in several pilot communities in Mongolia and Tanzania. We took the same approach in both countries – working with communities that were pastoral by tradition but were being heavily impacted by mining.

Today I'm going to focus on Mongolia and our collaboration with the National Land Agency, ALAMGAC. Since the start of WOLTS, we worked closely with the Mongolian NGO, PCC, which has expertise in locally led conservation and natural resource management. Our work together aimed to develop inclusive, gender-responsive land governance tools to address climate-related social and economic challenges facing Mongolian herders. Key here is pastureland degradation, which impacts both family livelihoods and social norms and structures.

ABOUT WOLTS GENDER AND LAND CHAMPIONS TRAINING

The overall WOLTS approach was iteratively designed to build local people's ownership and capacity to determine what land governance, land management and tenure security issues need to be addressed, to have confidence to address them, and to share lessons beyond their community. These were the fundamental principles underlying our work with the herding communities in both countries.

We found that our locally driven programme of nurturing cohorts of 'gender and land champions', men and women, is forming a critical mass for change, not only around local land governance, land management, and landscape development planning, but also in broader social norms. A focus on gender rather than solely on women, and the practice of including men and fostering support from community leaders, has allowed attitudes about land rights and governance to evolve in an unthreatening way. This was particularly important in the Mongolian context as, when we started, there was an assumption that after some 70 years of socialism, gender equality was a done deal and that we would find no issues for women or vulnerable people's land rights. In fact, we found many gender and land issues and have

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published a lot on this over the years (e.g. Daley et al, 2021a; Daley et al, 2023; Narangerel, 2018; Narangerel, 2019; Suvd, 2020).

Through WOLTS, we found, in general, that outcomes have been most pronounced where ‘mentors’ – people who already had influence or expertise – supported training of new champions. Those champions have gone on to become leaders addressing a range of gender- and land- related problems in their communities. One example of this that made the national news in Mongolia, was a peaceful demonstration, led by herders who had benefited from the WOLTS programme, that gained national political attention, and pledges from the President to ensure rules were followed by mining companies to protect their pastureland (Munkhtuvshin, 2022).

The WOLTS approach promises sustainable improvements in tenure security through local ownership of improved and inclusive land governance. But what does this mean on a very practical level in Mongolia?

ABOUT THE ALAMGAC COLLABORATION

Alongside our efforts to strengthen capacity of local gender and land champions, the importance of our work was recognized early on by the Mongolian National Land Agency, ALAMGAC. Together, PCC and Mokoro were able to develop a good relationship with senior officials at ALAMGAC. This built on PCC’s existing relationship, as they have worked alongside ALAMGAC and FAO to support the VGGTs implementation process in Mongolia over the past decade or so.

As the aim of WOLTS is to promote participatory engagement in local land governance, with all men and women encouraged to be part of decision-making about land, we were delighted when the opportunity arose to partner with ALAMGAC to develop ‘gender guidelines’ for local landscape development planning. These ‘gender guidelines’ were designed for inclusion in broader national guidelines for local landscape development planning, took a participatory approach to local planning and had already been developed by ALAMGAC. They were already being tested in a number of pilot districts when we started our WOLTS activities.

We really liked the ALAMGAC approach but felt it could be strengthened by a clearer focus on bringing in gender equity principles and techniques for more participatory consultation and facilitation. We signed an MOU with ALAMGAC and the regional and district governments in one of our WOLTS pilot areas in 2018 to develop and pilot a set of ‘gender guidelines’ to support the national process. The WOLTS team then worked closely with local herders, including our trained gender and land champions in one pilot community, to develop and test these new ‘gender guidelines’.

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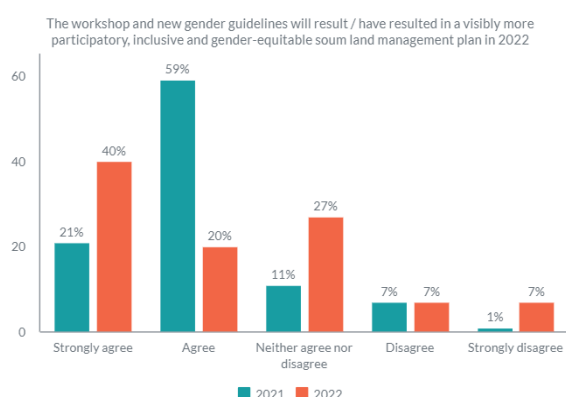
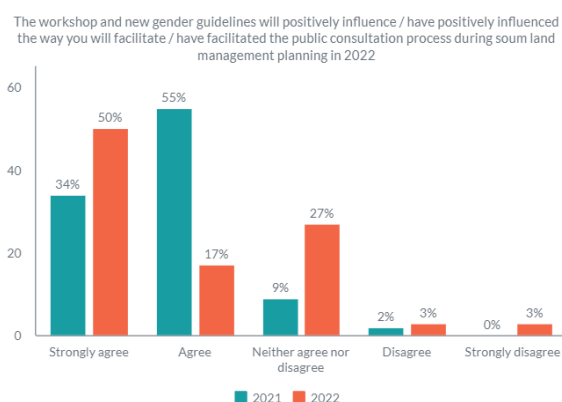
IMPACT OF THE GENDER GUIDELINES

Our approach was ultimately endorsed by ALAMGAC and included in a new printed version of the participatory national guidelines for local landscape development planning that has been distributed in hard copy to land offices throughout the whole country (Daley et al, 2021b; Lkhamdulam et al, 2021).

WOLTS was also able to introduce the new guidance on gender to over 330 district land officers around Mongolia through a series of online workshops led by PCC in late 2021 (Narangerel, 2022), and then with an in-person training for higher-level land officers from every province in Mongolia at the end of 2022.

We carried out surveys to check impact perceptions of these dissemination efforts and I'll briefly present that data here. The first set of charts show local land officers' perceptions of the impact from what they learned about the 'gender guidelines' in the online training – the blue shows their immediate reaction, and the orange shows, 1 year later, what they felt the impact had been in practice. We were very pleased with the increase in strongly agree responses over time on both questions.

Local government land officers' perceptions about the impact of online training



Source: Daley et al. (2023) Confident Gender and Land Champions.

For the subsequent in-person training with senior government stakeholders, WOLTS champions took part in-person to share their experiences - **and this was one of the most impactful parts of the initiative**.

The second set of charts show those senior government stakeholders' perceptions of the influence of what they learned in the face-to-face training – the first chart shows their expectations about how it would influence their own work and the second chart shows their

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general expectations of how much the ‘gender guidelines’ would contribute to improving participation and inclusion in local land planning processes. Again, we were very pleased with the strongly agree results on both charts, in blue this time.

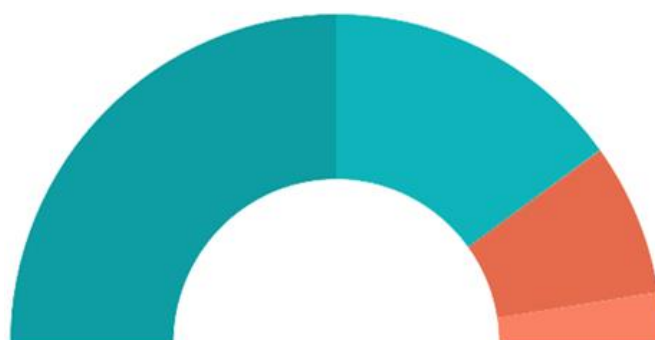
Senior government land officers’ perceptions about the value of meeting gender and land champions in face-to-face workshop on new ‘gender guidelines’

The workshop and new gender guidelines will positively influence the way you facilitate public consultation during soum land management planning



Strongly agree (75%) Agree (10%)
Neither agree nor disagree (10%) Disagree (5%)

In your opinion, the workshop and new gender guidelines will result in a visibly more participatory, inclusive and gender-equitable soum land management plan



Strongly agree (50%) Agree (30%)
Neither agree nor disagree (15%) Disagree (5%)

Source: Daley et al. (2023) Confident Gender and Land Champions.

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The new gender guidelines provide a framework for herding communities to fully and effectively participate in local level planning for sustainable pastureland management alongside local leaders, with positive impacts for local land governance.

Increasing awareness of the importance of inclusive local participation in land governance has strengthened herders' confidence to defend their land rights when these are challenged by mining companies not respecting licensing processes or environmental standards, as the national protest I mentioned earlier also showed.

Through this collaboration with ALAMGAC, together with my colleagues from PCC and Mokoro, we have shown how addressing gender equity and inclusion is essential to successful solutions to managing competing interests in land – and that this approach can be formally adopted in national land planning.

Initial feedback suggests the guidelines are beginning to be used in practice, with some donors interested in supporting additional training in districts undergoing donor-funded landscape planning. For instance, in 2022 the FAO/WWF-GEF Dryland Project used the gender guidance in their capacity-building training with local government officials and community leaders.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

I'd like to conclude by highlighting four key takeaways in terms of the wider lessons from all this work.

1. First, projects like WOLTS, that build strong collaborations between communities, local governments and civil society, can increase their impact by **partnering also with relevant national institutions** to magnify impacts across a whole country. In this case, ALAMGAC.
2. Second – and this is key – **it takes a lot of time**, both to **build the relationships**, and also to **fully develop, pilot and then start to roll-out the guidance that is collaboratively developed**. But it is totally worthwhile and very satisfying for all those involved.
3. Third, **a crucial enabling condition is finding a national level partner that is receptive and proactive in their own efforts to strengthen local land governance and landscape planning**. Our experience suggests that the key is to identify and work closely with 'champions of change' in national institutions. In this case, ALAMGAC.
4. Last, we need to recognize that **broad partnerships like ours involve some level of trade-off**. In theory this can present some dilemmas for CSOs like PCC and outside organisations like Mokoro, which is UK-based, as well as for project team members. What do I mean by this? Maybe we can't be as radical in our suggestions for

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strengthening women's land rights as we might if we had a blank sheet of paper! But in fact, we found it was really not an issue in practice. **Good relationships, discussion, taking time to allow things to coalesce and listening to the locals are the most important principles.** As a project, we are guests there to support the government and the local people, not to dictate.

In sum, we found that with an **open mind and the right attitude** we could really have a major impact on moving towards stronger and more inclusive land governance, land management and landscape development planning in practice - in a way that is locally-driven and which includes **strong local ownership from the gender and land champions in the communities right up to the national policy-makers.** I leave all this as food for thought, and maybe some inspiration.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Dr Elizabeth Daley serves in a voluntary capacity as Chair of the Board of the Land Portal Foundation and has worked as an independent consultant on land tenure, gender equity and social inclusion for over 20 years, including as Team Leader and instigator of the WOLTS (Women's Land Tenure Security) project from its inception in 2015. Elizabeth has worked for varied clients including FAO, IFAD and WFP; bilateral donor agencies such as FCDO/DFID, RVO and USAID; NGOs like ActionAid International and the International Land Coalition (ILC); and national governments (notably in Rwanda), philanthropists, private sector companies and more. Roles have included legal and policy reviews, project and programme evaluations, design and implementation of training and capacity building programmes, technical advisory inputs to land administration projects, and rigorous academic and technical fieldwork-based research on a host of land-related issues.

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