

Research, Network and Support Facility (RNSF)

“Support to enhance livelihoods per people dependent on informal economy
and improve social inclusion of marginalised and vulnerable persons”

Good Practices and Lessons Learned

RESEARCH QUESTION	1- ENABLING ENVIRONMENT
SUB-TOPIC (Research matrix)	<u>Capacity strengthening of government and civil society organisations, including on micro-finance (1.9)</u>
RESUME OF GOOD PRACTICES	The Lake Hovsgol Conservancy (LHC) was created to prevent unlawful commercial fishing, logging, and overgrazing in the Lake Hovsgol National Park. The LHC allowed to: 1) support the proper management of Lake Hovsgol National Park and its adjacent protected areas and assist the park management in building capacities, training and visitor services; 2) help the park sustain its wilderness resources; 3) protect local nomadic culture; and 4) promote sustainable recreation and locally-provided tourism activities thereby increasing employment and job opportunities for local residents; 5) create a higher awareness about the importance of protecting the LHNP.
PROJECT NAME	<i>Guiding and Integrating a Sustainable Economic Revitalization of Local Communities Dependent on the long-term Stewardship of Lake Hovsgol National Park</i>
YEAR	08/2012 – 07/2015
FUNDING AGENCY	European Commission
IMPLEMENTING AGENCY	Global Nature Fund, Mongol Ecology Centre
REGION	Central Asia
COUNTRY OF IMPLEMENTATION	Mongolia
SUMMARY OF THE ACTION	The main goal of the action was to support the economic revitalisation and proper stewardship of the lake Hovsgol area. The project aimed to help both the park and the surrounding communities coping with the inevitable growth of tourism and to ensure that the Hovsgol region develops in a sustainable manner, with minimised impact to the rich environmental and cultural heritage that characterises this remote area.
KEY TARGET GROUPS	Local officials and tour service providers
GOOD PRACTICES	

In 2011, when the Mongol Ecology Centre (MEC) visited Lake Hovsgol National Park (LHNP) with a team of international experts, it became immediately apparent that prompt action was needed to prevent unlawful commercial fishing, logging, and overgrazing. The shorelines were littered with debris and heavily damaged by off-road vehicles. There were *ger* and other tourist camps with faulty or insufficient sewage facilities that did not meet minimum standards, along with a new extension of a major highway leading into the park. The availability of the highway resulted in a dramatic increase in visitors, adding stress on the already limited park capacity to handle tourism. The adjacent gateway communities of Hatgal and Hankh were equally unprepared for burgeoning volumes of tourists. Data shows that the number of park visitors increased from 7,700 in 2004 to 49,000 in 2012 (with a forecast of 80,000 visitors for 2015).

To tackle this large spectrum of challenges, the MEC implemented this project and established the Lake Hovsgol Conservancy (LHC), so as to:

- 1) support the proper management of Lake Hovsgol National Park and its adjacent protected areas and assist the park management in building capacities, training and visitor services;
- 2) help the park sustain its wilderness resources;
- 3) protect local nomadic culture; and
- 4) promote sustainable recreation and locally-provided tourism activities thereby increasing employment and job opportunities for local residents;
- 5) create a higher awareness about the importance of protecting the LHNP.

As noted in the project Final Report, several outcomes positively affected the target groups and beneficiaries. In particular, the local populations became more aware of challenges they face, and better prepared for dealing with future development and with climate-change impacts on their water ecosystems. More opportunities were made available for tourism development involving local communities and small scale entrepreneurs. Last but not least, the elected officials were in a position to request continuing assistance for the park and for local communities to enhance sustainable tourism development and tourism facilities, improve waste management, and promote the growth of tourism-related retail developments

LESSONS LEARNED

During the Action the MEC learned several lessons that caused them to modify both its tactics and strategies. Strategically, the MEC learned to appreciate the complex layering of decision-making within the government, and compensated with timely meetings with Ministry and the park leadership. The MEC also learned that partnerships with newly formed organizations or associations required constant follow-up, so as to ensure that the follow-up actions would meet the assigned goals. Tactically, the MEC learned that language barriers required regular translating for international exchanges, and that international experts would need to understand and adjust to the learning style of local Mongolian participants. In the end, experiential learning, more than classroom coursework, became a very effective learning tool at the park. The MEC grew to understand that talking in abstract concepts was far less effective than using straightforward graphic presentations or other concrete illustrations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the project achieved a number of positive outcomes in particular at the local level, the achievement of one of its main goals – facilitation of enabling environment – has been complicated by the complex and diversified relationships with the national authorities. There has been a high turnover at the main counterpart Ministry during the project implementation period, which complicated the relationships and national ownership of the project. In the course of the project implementation it turned out that enforcement from the national authorities was inevitable for reaching some of the projects' goals (e.g. implementation of controls and bans in illegal tourist camps and irregular activities in the neighbourhood of the lake). The deterrence of these irregular activities from the side of the authorities was weak and the project staff did not have the capacity/authority to enforce. Similarly, an insufficient coordination between the project and the national authorities led to the acceptance of important documents (Zoning of the Park) came as a surprise to the project team. In this sense, the project team found itself in a position in between the informal activities run by the illegal camp owners and the formal activities performed by the authorities, whereas it has been to an extent detached from both these stakeholders. Therefore, the potential role of providing a bridge between the two stakeholders has not been fulfilled.



Potentially the people dependent or engaged in the illegal camps and other illegal activities in the park should have played a major role in the project. The lack of contact with this group of actors, lack of dialogue and understanding of their situation led to the frustrating situation that has been described in project Final report (quoted below).

“How would you assess the relationship between your organisation and State authorities in the Action countries? How has this relationship affected the Action?”

2012-2013: Frankly speaking, at the beginning the relationship with the State authorities was smoother than it was at later times. With the change of Mongolian governments in the summer of 2012, a new director of the Specially Protected Department at the Ministry was appointed. This new director welcomed the project at first, approved recommendations included in our management action plans, and later took time to visit the park and witness the implementation of the project. The Park Director, on the other hand, has consistently proven to be less than capable of coping with complex park administrative matters, community relations, and tour business partnerships. Regardless of this shortcoming, the project proceeded quite well in the first year with the support of the Ministry.

2013-2014: However, as time elapsed for this project, the MEC’s relationship with the Ministry of Environment and Green Development and its Specially Protected Areas Department (SPAD) became nuanced and challenging. The MEC’s 2012 agreement with the Ministry addressed the importance of basing all management actions on science-based information, while improving management capacity and the park’s implementation of the recommended action-plans.

At all stages of this collaboration the MEC staff did not lose sight of the fundamental significance of the park’s resources as a whole; nor has the MEC lost focus on the overall purpose of the park, and its vision for desired future conditions in the park (for example, please see the: General Management Plan Foundation Document). In addition to this Foundation Document, the 2012 project team developed 3 subset Management Action Plans, addressing issues related to Visitor Services, Interpretation & Education, and Transportation.

In 2013, Ms. Erdenechimeg Tegshjargal, the Director of the Mongolian Specially Protected Areas Department joined the MEC planning team in a tour of the park. Interaction with the Director seemed productive at the time. In addition to visiting key sites in the park, discussions were candid in relation to site-specific issues of tourism development and maintaining standards for sustainable tourism. Many other topics were discussed with the Director at length, including water quality and supply, sanitation and waste management, and issues related to park access and local transport. In the end, the MEC settled on 3 priority topics for further discussion and resolution – 1) maintaining internationally accepted standards for the development of sustainable tourism, 2) improving park transportation and establishing a shuttle bus system and 3) possible revisions to the park’s land-use zoning system.

During the summer of 2013, the MEC team reviewed and provided comments on the draft eco-tourism development standards that had been set forth earlier. In November of 2013, new *ger* camp standards were officially approved for the park. These new and improved standards would provide an excellent platform for future development.

Discussions regarding a transportation shuttle system were not fully successful, however—at least in the way the MEC had anticipated. The MEC had strongly recommended that a survey of existing transportation patterns be conducted in 2014. But the Ministry advised that there was no time for this research and a shuttle system would be initiated at the beginning of 2014, without any real efforts at assessing needs. Paradoxically, as of today, no shuttle system has been initiated for the park.

In months prior, several members of our MEC expert team travelled with another Ministry representative, visiting several Soum centres, and seeking community advice and input on park zoning.

The MEC also asked the Lake Hovsgol Conservancy’s Science Advisory Committee to review the proposed zoning when drafted. However, in March of 2014, the MEC was given a previously unannounced copy of Park Zoning documents, as officially approved in January of 2014. The new zoning pattern had essentially been established without any outside or public review. As mentioned earlier, the most significant change was a reduction of the “special” (or no-development) zones of the park, resulting in a 25% increase in the “limited use” zone (earmarked for wider-spread development).

The impact of this zoning change is not insignificant. In the 1990s, the Mongolian government helped identify Lake Hovsgol



as an International Long-Range Ecological Research area—one of 40 ILTERs in the world at that time. As part of this program, an area along the northeast shoreline of the park became the focal point for climate-change and permafrost research for the last 2 decades. This area has only now been summarily rezoned for tourism development. As a result, in a very sensitive area a large tourist camp was established in the last 12 months. When the MEC inquired about its legality, it was advised that the local government improperly permitted the development, and that the camp owners had been directed to remove the camp. In the summer of 2014, however, this camp—which is owned by a Mongolian mining company and used by its employees and guests for summer getaways—had not been removed. In fact, it was much larger in scale.

Yet again, when the MEC inquired about this turn of events, the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Environment and Green Development, Mr. Tulga Buya, advised that no new licenses for any *ger* camps had been issued. At the same time, local park rangers in this area have told the MEC in confidence that they were instructed to “mind their own business” when it comes to this camp. In addition, in the southwest sector of the lake, just northwest of Hatgal, the growth of *ger* camps and guesthouses continues unchecked. Both the old and new legal standards require a 1 km separation between tourist facilities; yet 50 facilities exist in this area, or an average of more than 2 *ger* camps per kilometre. When asked about this situation, the local rangers readily agreed that “the area is being trashed”—a statement that clearly indicates that the Ministry has fallen far short of assuring that the park is administered in compliance with national laws and officially approved standards.

The MEC has written the ministry repeatedly to address these issues, and has yet to receive a full answer. In spite of these issues and concerns, the MEC has chosen to continue its program of demonstrating best management practices at Lake Hovsgol National Park. In fact, the MEC remains convinced that the continued demonstration and sharing of best management practices will result in a real positive change for the park over the long run.

A final note: in March 2014, a MEC team met with Ms. Oyun Sanjaasuren, the Mongolian Minister of Environment and Green Development. Opportunities were discussed for federal funding of the park, particularly for building up its Visitor Centre, its park ranger stations/entrance posts, and a park sign system. At the end of this meeting, the Minister advised the MEC that it should fundraise on its own for the proposed visitor facilities and other improvements, as government funding would not be available.

Given this blunt statement from the Ministry, the MEC finds that it must continue with its Blue Waves and other global campaigns to fundraise for park improvements.

2014-2015: Over the last 4 years changes within the government have required the MEC to work with 3 different Ministers and 3 different Protected Area Department Directors. Currently the government is reorganizing yet again—by the end of 2015 the MEC will be working with a newly appointed Minister and Department Director.

At the park level, the Lake Hovsgol National Park Director has remained in place since 2011. He is proud of his position and the historic traditional culture of Lake Hovsgol; but in the eyes of the MEC, he lacks real vision for the future of his protected area. He also has shown little inclination towards team-building with his staff, and his community partnership-building skills with the two “gateway” villages adjacent to the park have also been wholly latent.

Given these deficiencies, MEC’s efforts at helping Lake Hovsgol National Park and its Ministry supervisors to build up park management capacity have been only sporadically successful. Under these conditions the MEC believes that its only recourse is to continue to provide services and support the park and the surrounding communities in the hope that someday recommended actions will take hold, and positive changes will endure within the park and at the Protected Area Department in the Ministry.

At the same time, the MEC’s relationship with the Governor of Hovsgol Aimag, and with the Deputy Governor and Mayor of Hatgal, have been very positive and productive. Local authorities have shown themselves very interested and eager to address issues of sustainable tourism development and job creation, both inside and outside the park.”

<p>FURTHER TAGS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Environmental and sustainable informal economy enterprises (green jobs, reducing impact on the environment of the IE) (2.4) ▪ Vocational and skills training (3.6)
<p>SOURCE</p>	<p>RNSF Research Volume 4.3: https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/iesf/documents/rnsf-research-volume-43-gp-ll-15-ec-funded-projects</p>
<p>REFERENCE</p>	<p>EUROPEAID Project page: https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/node/99023_et</p> <p>GLOBAL NATURE FUND: project page: https://www.globalnature.org/en/support---donation/supported-projects/hovsgol-2014</p>

