

KEIO UNIVERSITY

SHONAN FUJISAWA CAMPUS

Taikichiro Mori Memorial Research Grants

RESEARCH ACHIEVEMENT REPORT

FIELD WORK DUNDGOBI PROVINCE MONGOLIA

Name of the research project: Delivering microfinance services to the extreme poor in remote rural Mongolia

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To: Taikichiro Mori Memorial Research Grant's Committee
From: Batmunkh Batbold, 2nd year student, MA candidate,
Graduate School of Media and Governance
Subject: Research achievement report
Date: January 28, 2010

Dear Sir or Madam

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Committee of Taikichiro Mori Memorial Research Grant, and its staff for granting me this opportunity to conduct a field work in Mongolia, during summer of 2009. It is a great honor to have been awarded the Mori Grant, and I am very delighted that you gave me the opportunity to conduct this research. The conducted fieldwork was the main part of my thesis and therefore it was in great importance to me.

1. Purpose of the research

Since the end of 90's, Mongolian financial industry has strengthened significantly with expansion of access, a wide range of available financial services to the people and increased competition between financial institutions. However, these improvements are a common sight, mainly in urban areas and did good to only some part of the population who previously had no access to usual financial institutions and who could meet the bank's requirements.

Therefore, many rural residents and particularly herders who lost their livestock due to a harsh climate, and the poor households who cannot meet the bank's requirement still lack access to financial services, which could be used to reduce their vulnerability to sudden shocks and build economic assets.

So, the main objective of my research is to examine the factors which prevent the poor people from getting an access to financial services. Furthermore, to propose an appropriate approach to deliver financial services to these people who cannot qualify to get financial services from traditional financial institutions.

Within this general objective, I intend to examine and study following questions as main research questions of my thesis. Those are:

- Who are the poor? What are the characteristics of the poor in rural Mongolia?
- What are the difficulties faced by the poor people?

- How do they cope with their financial needs? What could be their purpose in seeking credit?
- What are the obstacles which prevent the poor people from getting an access to finance?
- How to deliver microfinance for the poor people in the rural area of Mongolia?

2. Significance of the research

Access to financial services, particularly credit, provides an opportunity to create a self-employment so that the poor can start or expand their micro businesses and thus accumulate assets, which would give them future income. The poor use credit to supplement their small cash flows in order to avoid periods when their access to food, clothing, shelter, or education is lost. By having an access to financial services the poor gets a chance to participate in economic activities, increase their incomes and finally contribute to economic development of the country. Also, credit helps to make it easier to manage shocks such as business failures, illness, theft, and natural disasters.

The positive experiences from countries like Bolivia, Bangladesh and Indonesia, where microfinance has helped to raise the welfare of thousands of poor people above the poverty line, shows that promotion of microfinance schemes could offer a significant support to fight against the poverty. According to the data provided by the Bank of Mongolia, globally the number of people who got out of the poverty using microcredit increased up to 33.8 million in 2005 while the number was around 7.6 million people in 1997¹.

Therefore, for Mongolia, with three quarters of the population living below the poverty line² and dwelling in rural areas, promotion of microfinance schemes, especially in rural areas has been considered an essential part of the Government's poverty reduction policy³.

3. Background

3.1. *Poverty situation in Mongolia*

Although Mongolia has been enjoying the high economic growth (Figure 1) for the last few years, the country still faces substantial difficulties as the high growth has been insufficient to

¹ Annual Report 2007, Bank of Mongolia

² Refers to income line set by the Government of Mongolia depending on different region. The line is updated every year. As of 2008, poverty line was around 70 USD in rural areas and 100 USD in urban areas respectively.

³ Economic Growth Support and Poverty Reduction Strategy, 2003

improve the living conditions of a majority of the population that fell into poverty in the early years of transition.

Figure 1. GDP growth of Mongolia

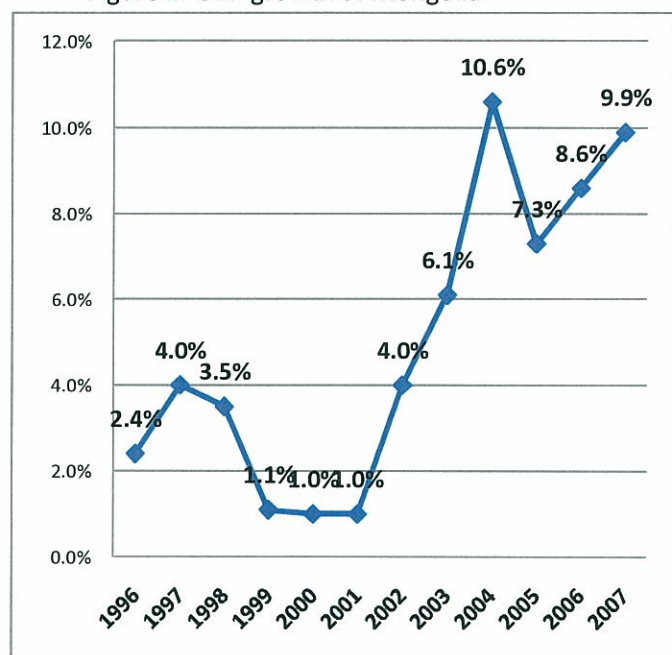
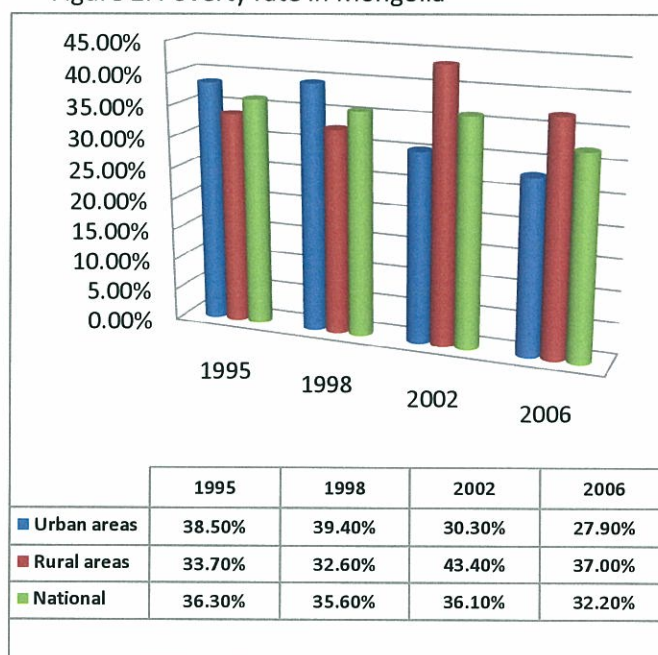


Figure 2. Poverty rate in Mongolia



While, the overall trend of the economic growth has had a positive increase since 2001, the poverty rate has not been decreasing substantially (Figure 2).

According to the data provided by Human Development Report 2007⁴, income inequality is increasing significantly at the national level and this trend is explicit, especially in the urban areas and Ulaanbaatar (capital) city. The level of income inequality is varying across regions, provinces and Ulaanbaatar city. As table 1 shows that during the 2003 and 2006 when the economic growth had been increasing sharply, a very large increase occurred to the national level of inequality. While the rise in inequality was slower in the Western and Khangai regions, and in Ulaanbaatar city, it was large in all areas.

Table 1. Inequality trend, 1998, 2002-2003 and 2006, GINI

Coefficient for consumption

Regions	1998	2002-2003	2006
National average	0.350	0.329	0.380
Urban		0.331	0.386
Rural		0.313	0.360
Region			
West		0.306	0.342

⁴ Mongolia Human Development Report 2007, Employment and Poverty in Mongolia, UNDP, 2008

<i>Khangai</i>	0.320	0.354
<i>Central</i>	0.314	0.393
<i>East</i>	0.317	0.399
Location		
<i>Ulaanbaatar</i>	0.332	0.367
<i>Province centers</i>	0.324	0.389
<i>Soum centers</i>	0.318	0.373
<i>Countryside</i>	0.309	0.346

Source: Mongolia Human Development Report 2007

Table 1 illustrates that, there is a considerable gap in income distribution between different regions, especially between urban and rural areas where the GINI coefficient difference increased up to 0.026 points in 2006, increasing from 0.018 points in 2003. This data along with continuing rise of the poverty level implies that the more than 30 percent⁵ of Mongolian population who are trapped in poverty, are not benefiting from the high level of economic growth which we have seen in last few years.

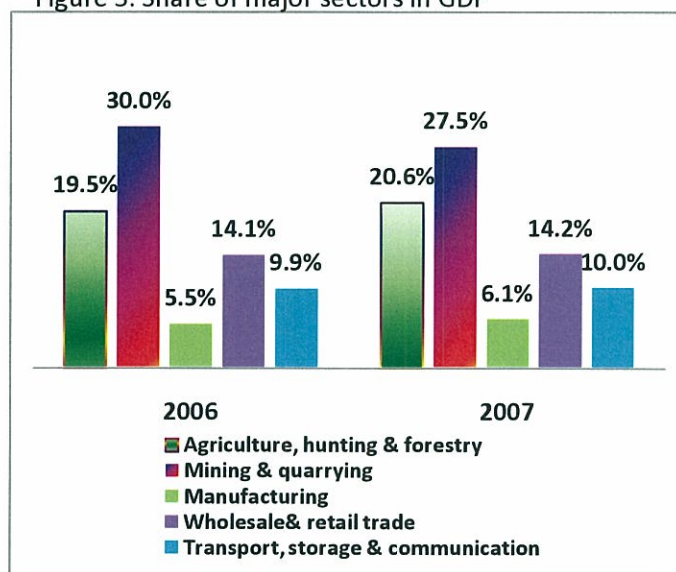
Poverty has been deep rooted not only in urban areas but also in rural regions, where the majority of the country's poor live. Rural poor peoples' livelihood security and sustainability depend heavily on the agricultural sector which produces more than 20 percent⁶ (Figure 3) of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), most of it from the livestock production.

According to the statistical data (table 2) on the monthly average income composition for household, greater part of the household income in monetary terms comes, firstly, from pensions and allowances and secondly from household's own businesses, which mean, for the most part, from livestock production, especially in rural areas. This suggests that animal (livestock) husbandry is the main source of livelihood for rural people, especially for the poor and low income households.

⁵ As of 2006, the poverty rate was 32.7 percent at the national level. Statistical Yearbook, 2007

⁶ Statistical Yearbook, 2007

Figure 3. Share of major sectors in GDP



Source: Statistical Yearbook 2007

Livestock serves for herder households as a currency, a means of asset accumulation, a means of transportation, a means of survival, and a means to determine their social status (wealthy or poor).

Table 2. Monthly average income composition for household

Types of income	2004		2005		2006		2007	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Monetary income								
<i>Wages and salaries</i>	92.3	63.1	94.8	80.8	95.1	84.0	96.2	81.0
<i>Pensions and allowances</i>	47.4	12.3	55.6	14.4	58.6	19.6	50.5	21.1
<i>Income from household businesses</i>	10	6.7	11.3	8.9	13.7	9.9	15.2	15.3
<i>Other</i>	23.8	37.8	19.0	52.3	14.7	47.3	21.3	37.9
Received from others for free	11.0	6.3	8.8	5.3	8.1	7.2	9.2	6.7
Food preparation from own business	4.5	3.3	3.7	2.5	2.6	1.9	2.9	3.4

Source: Statistical Yearbook 2007

Rural poor people are spread out, isolated from each other and highly mobile due to the need to find pastureland for their livestock. They are mainly in Western, Khangai and south central part of the country (Table 3).

Table 3. Poverty rate by areas and regions, 2006

	Poverty rate
National average	32.2%
Urban	27.9%
Rural	37.0%
Region	
West	38.7%
Khangai	37.7%
Central	34.0%
East	36.5%
Location	
Ulaanbaatar (capital city)	20.4%
Province centers	36.1%
Soum centers	37.3%
Countryside	36.8%

Source: Statistical Yearbook 2007

Within the provinces, poverty incidence is common in rural villages called *soums*, which is the smallest administrative unit in Mongolia, which made up of a few hundred families. Almost, the majority of the rural populations live with their families in traditional Mongolian shelter called *ger*. Half of the people in rural areas live in soum center, most of them working for state budget organizations such as the local administration office, school, hospital, etc. while the other half of the populations are semi-nomadic herders, who dwell outside of the soum centers and move constantly from one pastureland to another.

In Mongolia, nearly 14 percent⁷ (as of 2007) of Mongolia's population lives in households that rely on livestock production as the primary source of livelihood. Poverty incidence accounts for 26 percent⁸ out of total herder population. Small number of livestock hardly supports herders' families at the subsistence level, which is constantly threatened by increasing pastureland degradation, harsh climate and animal diseases. Therefore, in order to cope with these problems, they need financial support to strengthen their livestock base or find other sources of income. Unfortunately, the local financial institution's requirements turns out to be too difficult to meet and not appropriate for their conditions.

⁷ Statistical Yearbook, 2007

⁸ Mongolia Poverty Assessment, 2006, World Bank

Taking into account the importance of this sector to livelihood of Mongolian population, its vulnerability remains as the most important influential factor to the country's potential for sustainable development.

3.2. Microfinance sector

Mongolian microfinance sector consists of diverse actors including formal intermediary institutions like, commercial banks, non bank financial institutions, saving and credit cooperatives, insurance and financial leasing companies and pawn shops, and semi-formal institutions like, NGOs, government and donor funded projects⁹. However, unlike other countries where microfinance schemes are delivered through specialized Microfinance institutions, there is no financial institution in Mongolia, which specializes in microfinance for 100 percent. Also, the delivery approach¹⁰ is different than other countries. Financial institutions, especially big commercial banks provide micro credits along with their traditional loan products.

More than a decade ago, when microfinance arrangements had started its activity in Mongolia, they were mainly using the project-led approach, where disbursements of loans financed by grants or subsidized loans provided by the Government and external donor organizations. At that time, the microfinance industry of Mongolia was characterized by short term, subsidized and donor funded credit projects mainly implemented either by project units or by the local administration in rural areas. The poor financial regulation of many of these projects and fraud utilization of project funds at the local administration level resulted, eventually, in disappointing outcomes.

On the other hand, after the passing of a new Banking Law of Mongolia in 1991, which allowed the establishment of private banking, numerous new private banks¹¹ had started their activity. However, due to weak regulation, inefficient loan policies and poor bank management, most of them had to face bankruptcy, which contributed to a growing public distrust towards the banks.

⁹ Annual Report 2007, Bank of Mongolia

¹⁰ Microcredit delivery approach of Mongolian financial institutions is based purely on collateral basis. And there is no group lending product, which actually is the main delivery approach which substitutes the collateral requirement in other countries such as Bangladesh (Grameen bank), Indonesia and Philippines.

¹¹ As of 1999, there were totally 12 commercial banks operating in Mongolian financial sector. Bank of Mongolia, Annual Report, 1999

In order to ease the situation, the financial reforms and measures have been put into action since 1998 and overall financial performances started to improve. At the same time, the delivery approach of microfinance schemes has shifted towards a more professional method, granting this role more to the financial institutions. The result was quite satisfactory in terms of expanding outreach to whole population and self sustainability of the financial institutions. However, non poor groups, particularly those who have some collateral assets, which meet the financial institutions' requirement, have benefited from this improvement rather than the people in the core of the vicious poverty. The reason is that these schemes were unsuitable for the poor's reality requiring high collateral requirement thus failed to be accessed by them.

As of the end of 2007, there are over 100 non bank financial institutions and 17 commercial banks operating through their 732 sub branches throughout the country.

4. Problem consciousness

Since the proposed research intends to examine factors, which prevent the poor people from getting an access to financial services, at some level it will deal with the practical issues of the existing microfinance arrangements' delivery approach. The right type of approach which would suit the poor's needs largely depends on how poverty is understood, whether as essentially material, or more holistically as multi-dimensional.

Therefore, during this fieldwork, I have tried to focus more on understanding and studying the poverty reality in rural areas and moreover, the poor people's need and their daily life. So, hence the question must be raised how to define poverty. The "conventional" development discourse defines the term as an insufficient income and lack of physical assets. According to the Mongolian Law on Defining the Minimum Living Standards, poverty is defined by the minimum living standard approach and the National Statistical Office determines these levels differently by regions. As of 2007¹², the monetary equivalent of the poverty line was 73,300 MNT¹³ in Ulaanbaatar and 70,000 MNT in rural areas. Also, household with income less than 40 percent of the poverty line is defined as households *living in extreme poverty*.

The poverty issue is not just a lack of income and some physical assets. Poverty must be seen as the lack of basic capabilities, which are not yet developed. Sen (2000) described the poverty as

¹² Per capita a month, Statistical Yearbook, 2007.

¹³ MNT-Mongolian national currency. As of Dec 02, 2009, according to the Bank of Mongolia's exchange rate, 1USD was equal to 1452.74 MNT

a capability deprivation¹⁴. The poor is not “entitled” to have an access to financial services using which they can increase their income and live in poverty free life. Thus, maybe by understanding their life, by listening to them, by learning from them, we can understand their needs and reality, so that better approach can be found to help them to escape the poverty.

5. Hypothesis

So, then why the poor people cannot have an access to finance? The preventing factors can be demonstrated into following points:

- The poor people may be lacking collateral assets or some skills to manage or to run a business.
- High criteria set by financial institutions make it difficult for the poor to have an access to finance. For example: the AG bank¹⁵'s minimum requirement for loan in the rural area for the first time borrower is 200 heads of livestock, which is too tough for poor herder households.
- Mongolia is a large, landlocked and sparsely populated country. Weak infrastructure makes it even more difficult to reach constantly moving herders in the remote rural area.
- Also, from financial institutions' side there may be constraints related to human resource capacity (lack of skilled staff) and reluctance towards serving the poor.
- At the national level, the Government's perception to address the poverty, is itself may be needed to reconsider. Government is focusing on simplified approach, which lies simply on increasing money supply in terms of loan provision and welfare assistance.
- Since 2004, thanks to high economic growth which resulted from the commodity price increases in the international market, the Government has launched several major welfare assistance programs mostly due to the reason of winning people's vote. Those programs are:
 - Child allowance : for every child under age 18:
 - USD 2 per month.
 - USD 18 in every 3 months
 - USD 70 for new born child
 - USD 350 for newly married couple

¹⁴ “Development as Freedom”, Amartya Sen, 2000

¹⁵ AG bank- the leading Mongolian commercial bank which has branches almost in every soums of Mongolia.

6. Field work conducted during summer of 2009

The main objective of my fieldwork was to visit Dundgobi province of Mongolia, which I chose as a research site of my thesis, in order to contact my target informants and conduct in-depth interviews to understand their life situation and obstacles they face, which constrain their access to finance. Totally, 40 informants from two different soums (Luus and Delgertsogt) were interviewed using the questionnaire. In addition, about 14 respective officials from the Government agencies, financial institutions, local administrations, NGOs and donor organizations were interviewed to reflect their ideas and perception on delivering microfinance services to the poor in remote rural areas of Mongolia.

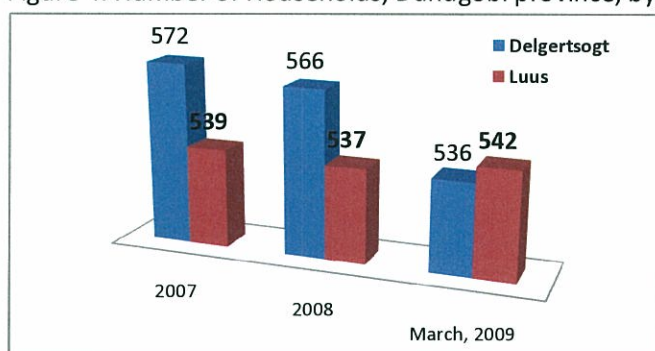
Table 4. Poverty rate in Dundgobi province

	2007			2008			March, 2009		
	Delgertsogt	Luus	Dundgobi Total	Delgertsogt	Luus	Dundgobi Total	Delgertsogt	Luus	Dundgobi Total
Extremely poor	4.8%	5.5%	4.3%	3.5%	5.0%	3.6%	6.9%	4.6%	4.0%
Poor	26.5%	23.0%	25.7%	26.8%	16.7%	26.2%	23.3%	20.8%	24.9%
Average	60.3%	61.1%	57.7%	56.8%	66.1%	57.4%	59.7%	65.1%	57.1%
Better off	8.4%	10.4%	12.3%	12.9%	12.1%	12.8%	10.1%	9.5%	14%

Source: Local government's statistic bulletin

The Dundgobi province is located in 280 km distance from capital of Mongolia. The Dundgobi, which means a middle Gobi (desert) province, is located in the mid part of the country between Umnugobi (South desert) and Tuv (Central) provinces. The territory of Dundgobi province is semi-desert and steppe. The main sector of economy is the livestock husbandry. The province is one of the areas where the poverty incidence is relatively high among the population.

Figure 4. Number of Households, Dundgobi province, by chart and table



	2007	2008	March, 2009
Dundgobi total	12730	12826	12976
Delgertsogt	572	566	536
Luus	539	537	542

Source: Local government's statistic bulletin

In summer of 2004¹⁶, a severe drought along with locust mice invasion occurred in the most part of the province which harshly shrank pastureland base and left the herders almost with no accessible hay making fields for their livestock. In that year, the province had a good winter with less snow and blizzards until February 2005. The heavy sudden snowfall hit the area at the end of February 2005 and the strong sand storm continued from the middle of February until the end of May. The sand storm did not let grass to grow, which made the livestock weaker. The consequence was devastating. According to the report from the local Emergency Agency, the total number of animal losses reached 154 thousand out of 1.5 million heads of livestock in the province. The losses of the offspring were more than 10 thousand. This huge loss of livestock contributed to the growing level of the poverty in the area, swelling number of impoverished herders.

Figure 4. Dundgobi province – research area



Area: 74,700 sq.km

Number of Households: 19,976 (As of March 2009)

Province center: Mandalgobi city

Number of soums: 15

Number of livestock: 2,025,700 heads¹⁷

Poverty level: 28.9% (As of March 2009)

7. Field work findings

1. Due to the current global financial downturn, overall financial performance in the Mongolian financial sector has worsened drastically. Nonperforming loan ratio increased from 3 percent in 2008 up to 8 percent as of March 2009¹⁸. Expected GDP growth¹⁹ for 2009 is going to fall to 2.7 percent from last year's 8.9 percent. Some major banks with a significant microfinance portfolio (AG, Post and Xac banks) have

¹⁶ Source: Dundgobi province, local administration's report

¹⁷ Dundgobi province – Local statistic

¹⁸ Source: Bank of Mongolia

¹⁹ IMF, World Economic Outlook, April 2009

significantly limited their lending, especially in rural areas, while some of them facing bankruptcy because of a huge number of non performing loans.

2. During the fieldwork, totally 40 informants were interviewed from two soums. Out of 40 informants were 14 herders, 9 persons with seasonal jobs such as: small scale mining during summer time and construction and road work, 8 unemployed, 5 workers of the state budget organization at the soum centers, and 4 retired senior citizens (Figure 5).
3. Around 70 percent of the informants were female and most of the informants' average monthly household income ranges from 21 to 50 USD per person (Figure 6).

Figure 5. Informants' occupation, by number

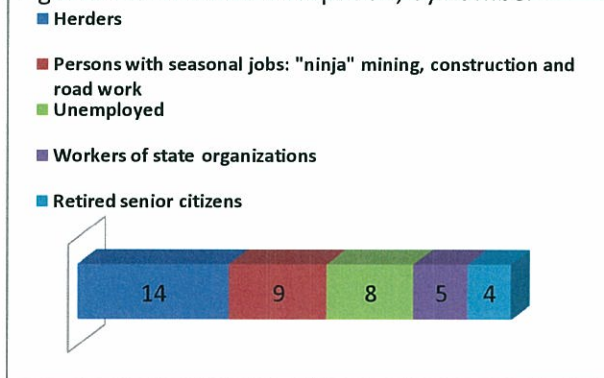
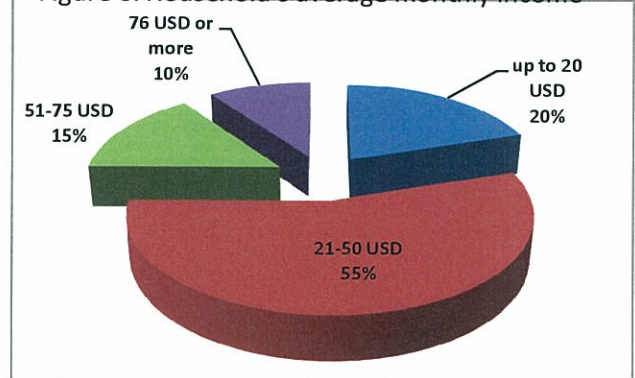
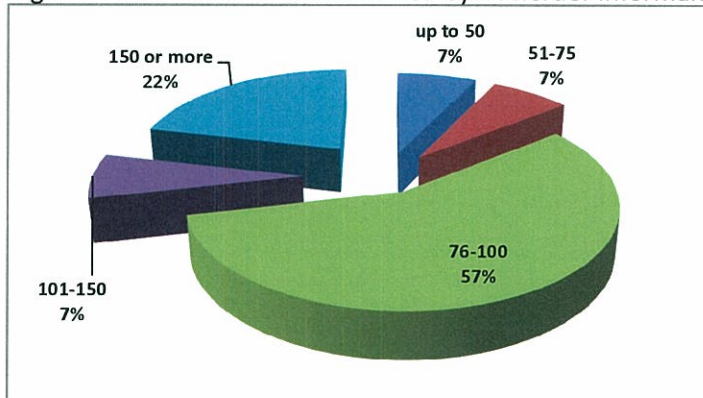


Figure 6. Household's average monthly income



4. Majority of the 14 herders interviewed have less than 100 heads of livestock (Figure7) which is far below the requirement set by the local financial institutions.

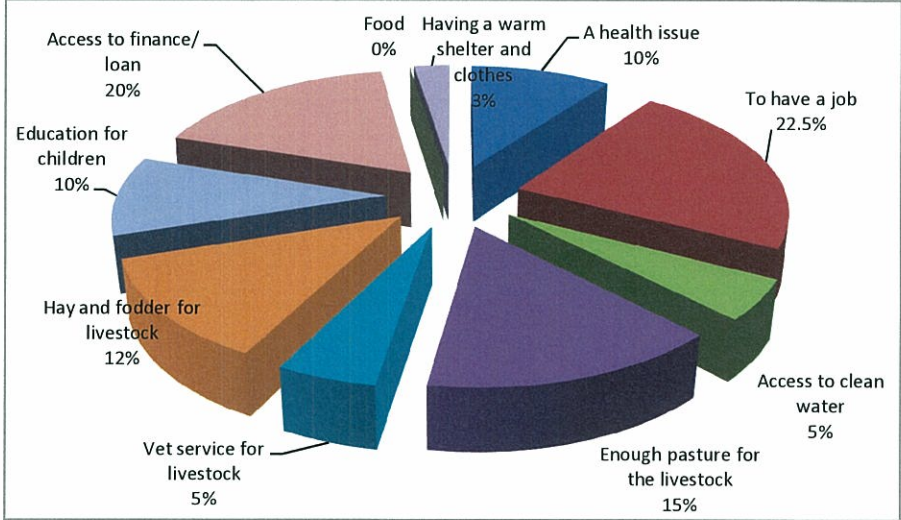
Figure 7. Number of livestock owned by 14 herder informants



5. One of the most important questions was related to identifying the target group's need at this point which would mean the purpose of microcredit taking. Not surprisingly, the

majority of the informants wanted to have a job with constant salary, which shows that these people willing to do something useful to help their situation. Second important need was to have an access to finance, which were chosen by 8 informants (Figure 8).

Figure 8. Critical challenges that the informants face



6. Continuing on summarizing questionnaire results, the next important question was related to identifying the informants’ financial need. To the question ‘what type of financial services do you need the most?’ 65 percent of the informants answered loan for supporting business activities (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Type of financial services that the informants need the most

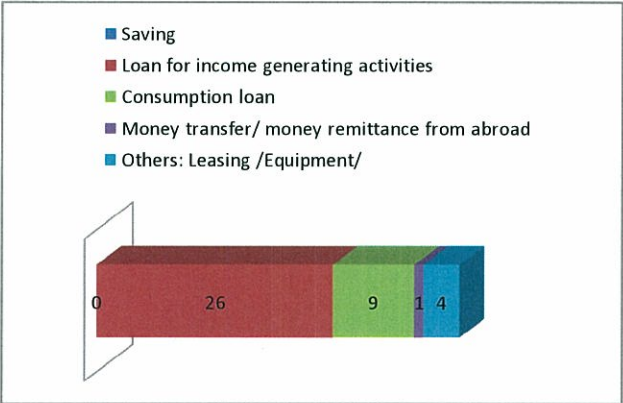
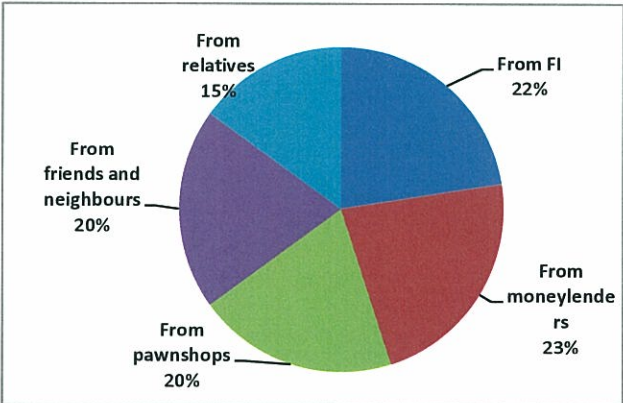


Figure 10. Source of credit



7. And also, due to the high collateral requirements set by the existing financial institutions, most of them borrow money from local moneylenders (Figure 11) who charge approximately 9-10 percent of interest rate per month. This makes the situation even worse, pushing the poor down to the debt chain.
8. Most of the informants have never applied for a loan from financial institutions. The possible reasons are:
 - Some of them answered that they do not know how to apply or think the application process is too complicated to understand.
 - Also, because of the collateral problem
 - Finally, some of the informants were saying that, instead of taking credit and trying to make something out of it, its better just be “a poor”. They prefer to be “a poor” and thus receive all kinds of assistance and free money from the Government and donor organizations.
9. Some of the herders who lost their livestock during the harsh winter of 2004 and 2005, Had migrated to the urban areas and some of them became assistant herders for rich herder families while others had engaged in seasonal jobs such as small scale mining /“ninja mining”/.
10. While interviewing respective officials from local administration, financial institutions and NGO, it was explicit that, even though the Government as well as donor organizations are channeling sufficient amount of the loan fund to lend to the rural poor through financial institutions, the high collateral requirement from financial institutions makes it very difficult for poor people to get this loan. Also, the local NGOs, and financial institutions seemed to be reluctant to work with the poor people. Instead they prefer to work with their existing /potential/ customers.
11. According to the table 4, because of the fact that most of the poor people (35 percent of the informants) had an elementary school education. This impairs their possibility to manage the loan which in further limits their access.

Table 4. Education level of the informants

Education level	Delgertsogt	Luus	Total	Percentage
Higher education	1	1	2	5.0%
High school	3	3	6	15.0%
Junior high school	5	7	12	30.0%
Middle school	2	2	4	10.0%
Elementary school	9	5	14	35.0%
Illiterate	0	2	2	5.0%

12. Weak infrastructure, isolation from the urban markets and small local market as well as rapidly decreasing local population, these factors are worsening the business environment, making it very difficult for borrowers to make use of the loan.

13. Most of the herder informants were living (at the time of interviewing) in a distance of 50 to 100 km from soum center. Thus, in order to have an access to the nearest financial institution they have to travel at least 100 km. Usually, loan application process takes 2-3 days at the soum level if the requested amount does not exceed 1000 USD (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Example of loan disbursement in rural areas.



Source: AG bank of Mongolia

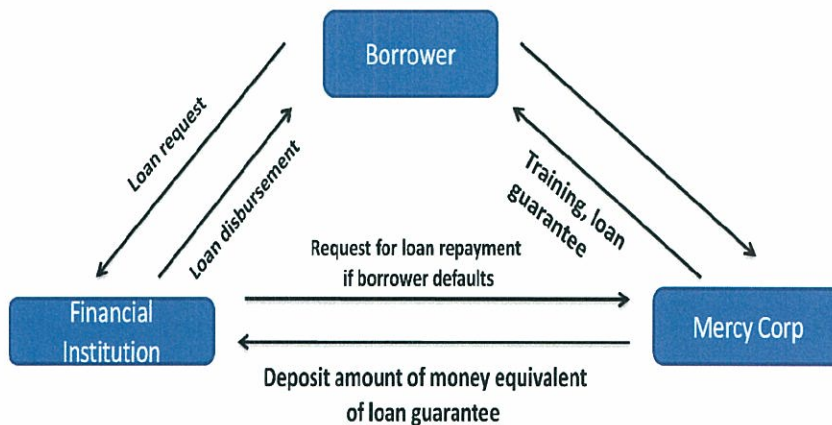
8. Preliminary Conclusions

To sum up, the fieldwork findings so far, the following preliminary conclusions can be made.

- The Government has been running several welfare assistance programs to help the poor. However, these programs and idea of “free money” adversely affects people’s mind making them more dependent on aid.

- Also, overall policy towards dealing with the poverty seems to rely solely on increasing the money supply in terms of loan provision and distributing the cash through welfare assistance. Therefore, this trend should be changed focusing more on holistic approach including not only loan provision and welfare program but also all kinds of capacity building training programs to improve the poor's ability to handle their own life.
- In future policy and actions should be directed to the easing of the high collateral requirement. For example: Mercy Corps NGO is operating in Dundgobi province with the purpose of diversifying and expanding rural businesses critical to Mongolia's agriculture sector. The NGO runs a risk sharing approach and loan guarantee fund to help the potential poor borrowers (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Working arrangements of Mercy Corp NGO



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