

# Relationship between Employment and Migration of Women in Mongolia

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## Introduction

Mongolia is located in Northeastern Asia and it has a territory of 1,566,500 sq. km, and a population of 2.56 million. It is a landlocked country surrounded by two huge countries - Russia and China. Being a former communist country, Mongolia has chosen a democratic political structure with market economy in 1990.

As of the year of 2005, 50.4% or 1,291,200 of the Mongolian population are women. The democratic new constitution of 1992 and relevant laws of Mongolia guarantee equal rights for women and men to employment and choice of professions and gets equally paid for the same work performed. Women in Mongolia are fully encouraged to be employed in their chosen sectors of economy. Women enjoy the same rights with men to own property and run economic entities, are economically independent and improve their skills and capacities and the state policy encourages them to enjoy the economic rights. But, transitional problems, such as unemployment, poverty and migration are affecting women and children more than other groups of the population.

This paper attempts to review the state of employment of women in Mongolia after the 90-ies and its effect on migration.

## Employment of Women in Mongolia

As to the Mongolian NSO data, the official registered unemployment rate in Mongolia has fallen steadily from 9% in 1994 to 3.3% in 2005. However, unemployed women have always been outnumbering unemployed men. (Table 1)

Table 1. **Unemployment Rate /by sex/**

|               | 1992 | 1993 | 1994 | 1995 | 1996 | 1997 | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Male</b>   | 5.6  | 7.8  | 8.1  | 5.0  | 6.3  | 7.3  | 5.4  | 4.1  | 4.1  | 4.2  | 3.1  | 3.2  | 3.3  | 3.0  |
| <b>Female</b> | 7.0  | 9.4  | 9.9  | 6.1  | 7.2  | 8.2  | 6.4  | 5.3  | 5.0  | 5.1  | 3.8  | 3.8  | 3.9  | 3.6  |

*Source: NSO Bulletin 2005, p.106*

Indeed, educational achievement of Mongolian women is remarkable and it is inherited from the communist time which has lasted for 70 years between 1921 and 1990. Currently, number of

girls comprised at secondary schools is higher by 20% than the number of boys and number of girls studying at colleges and universities are higher by 70% than the number of boys. The percentage of tertiary women has increased from 55% to 65.4% in the last decades. There are several reasons for sending girls to schools more than boys. *First*, unlike in any other Asian country, Mongolian families like to have girls almost equally as having boys. So, parents send their beloved girls to schools with pleasure in order to empower them. *Second*, with transition to market economy, herdsman families in countryside prefer to keep their boys at home because their labor is more useful for herding than girls'. *Third*, again with transition to market economy, structure of educational system in Mongolia was changed. Vocational and technical education institutions, which used to train graduates (mostly men) from 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> grades, were closed.

As women are getting more educated the boundaries between male and female roles in family and work are shifting. According to a survey conducted by the national Women's Information and Research Centre in late 90-ies, 36.0% of women are generating a significant part of the family income: 33.1% reported earning the major part of it, and 25.6% an amount equal to their husband's.

However, women's employment rate is not similar to their education level and there are reasons. *First*, women are still shouldering the burdens of household chorus due to the lack of family services, inadequate number of preschool children's institutions, high prices for household electric appliances. Household labor of women has never been registered and paid and the traditional social stereotype does not account housewives' work and child labor as a contribution to the national economy. *Second*, employers in both formal and informal sectors discriminate women on the basis of their gender and age (it is difficult for a woman aged above 35 to get job) showing their preference to hire younger women and male employees directly and indirectly. *Third*, many women are working at insecure job places. As some changes have taken place in the employment forms in line with the structural adjustment measures, the number employees, especially women employees, engaged in the private sector has been increasing. But, jobs at private sector are insecure and work conditions are improper due to early stage of the private business development. *Fourth*, although women are entitled to get education as men in Mongolia, the society is not allowing many women to take leading positions or make career. Currently, 64.5% of female workers are employed in educational sector, 71.3% of workers - in the social welfare sector and 63% of judges are women. It is evidence of the fact that women in general work at junior, middle and auxiliary positions and are concentrated in the lower income sectors of public and private sector. According to a survey

conducted by the Ulaanbaatar-based Women’s Information and Research Centre, only 6.8% of women employees were at top managerial positions, 43.8 % at middle positions and 49.1% at auxiliary positions.

In 1990-2005, number of women MPs dropped from 23.0% -11.8%. Only 12.0% of judges of Supreme Court (but, 63% of judges are women!), 11.0% of diplomats are women and no female governor or minister in provinces and ministries. It is not a favorable condition for the increase of social protection of women and engagement of women into social and economic activities.

As consequence of the higher women’s unemployment rate during the transition period, the number poor women and female family heads is increasing. According to the below table, about 61,765 women head the family and 46,298 are single parents.

Table 2. **Indicators of Women’s Vulnerability**

|   | <b>1993</b> | <b>1996</b> | <b>1999</b> | <b>2002</b> |
|---|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b><i>Female-headed households</i></b>            | 37,813      | 46,034      | 55,248      | 61,765      |
| <b><i>% in total households</i></b>               | 7.4%        | 8.9%        | 10.2%       | 10.9%       |
| <b><i>Single women with children under 16</i></b> | 30,973      | 36,220      | 40,653      | 46,298      |
| <b><i>% in total households</i></b>               | 6.1%        | 7.0%        | 7.5%        | 8.1%        |

Source: *Economic and Ecological Vulnerabilities and Human Security in Mongolia, Ulaanbaatar, 2005, p. 42*

According to another survey,<sup>1</sup> female-headed households comprise around 15% of the total households and a similar share of the poor.

In pre-transition Mongolia, the state supported women in child-bearing and child-care through generous benefits and day-care services. This helped to shape male roles and perceptions of them. Withdrawal of state support and changes in family earning patterns have destabilized familiar male and female roles in this respect. For women, their roles as “caregivers” has expanded while their need to earn wages for the household economy has also increased.<sup>2</sup> The result is, for many women that “these double burdens create role conflicts which then translate into lower career mobility as women attempt to balance the different demands placed on them.”<sup>3</sup>

In brief, evidences of discrimination and disparity of women in employment are summarized well by in a National CEDAW Watch report, as women suffer more than men from unemployment, women are dismissed first as a result of privatization and structural adjustment, lower position of

<sup>1</sup> Main Report of “Household Income and Expenditure Survey/Living Standards Measurement Survey 2002-2003”, Ulaanbaatar 2004, p. 23

<sup>2</sup> The Gender Dimension of Economic Transition in Mongolia by B. Robinson and A. Solongo, [www.eldis.org/fulltext/GenderMong.pdf](http://www.eldis.org/fulltext/GenderMong.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Human Development Report: Mongolia 2003, UNDP, Ulaanbaatar, p. 26

women in employment, women have lower promotion opportunities, women's work is less recognized in the public sphere, women receive less remuneration throughout their work life than men, different retirement age for men and women is set by legislation: 55 for women and 60 for men, and discriminative legislation as some laws, regulations and instructions reinforce social stereotypes on what sort of jobs are suitable for women etc.<sup>4</sup> Thus, in the last 16 years of transition, with growing rate of unemployment, number of women seeking employment abroad has been increasing from year to year.

### **Relationship between Employment and Migration**

In the last 16 years, both domestic and international forms of migration are increasing in Mongolia. Traditional sector of the Mongolian economy is pastoral animal breeding. Thus, animal sector is highly dependent on natural conditions and weather. Mongolia had two heavy snowfalls in 1997 and 2000 and many households in countryside lost their animals – the only source of their income. It served as beginning of domestic migration directed from countryside to urban places, mainly to Ulaanbaatar, capital city, Darkhan, second major city and Erdenet, third major city. In the last 5 years, an annual growth of Ulaanbaatar population was 3% which increased number of population from around 600 thousand before the 90-ies to today's 1 million. According to the 2000 census of population and apartments, 32% or one out of three Ulaanbaatar inhabitants are migrants from other cities or rural places.

Surveys conducted after 2000 revealed that main aims of migrants from countryside to urban places were to get jobs, make better their lives, educate their children and have access to markets, medical and education services. Thus, urban people who were already affected by transitional difficulties such as unemployment and poverty were also influenced by sudden inflow of domestic migrants. Economic and social infrastructures of major cities, which were not planned for doubled and tripled size of inhabitants, were heavily loaded and shortage of workplaces increased.

As to international migration, it started in 1990 upon disclosure of the communist curtain. Currently, outflow from Mongolia is greater than inflow to Mongolia. Although all local and foreign passengers crossing immigration posts in 2005 are summarized in the Table 3, it supports

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<sup>4</sup> Implementation of Mongolian Women's Employment Rights, Ulaanbaatar, 1999, <http://www.owc.org.mn/cedaw/Employment.htm>

the fact that the number of outbound passengers is somewhat greater than the number of inbound passengers.

Table 3. **Number of Inbound and Outbound Passengers** /by total of immigration posts/

|                 | <b>2002</b> | <b>2003</b> | <b>2004</b> | <b>2005</b> |
|-----------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| <b>Outbound</b> | 766,652     | 724,059     | 942,084     | 1,078,624   |
| <b>Inbound</b>  | 756,475     | 725,118     | 936,414     | 1,066,683   |

Source: NSO Bulletin 2005, p.255

If migration started with a few hundreds students studying abroad and merchants traveling between countries, in the mid 90-es, it intensified in a more organized form due to outbreak of domestic migration, increased acquaintance with the outside world and unstable economic growth in the home country. According to Survey Report of Status and Consequences of Mongolian Citizens Working Abroad (2005), the dominant motives for going abroad for Mongolian migrants were poor economic conditions, unemployment and family and personal matters.

In 2005, an estimated 100,000-120,000 Mongolians were living and working in foreign countries. About 17,000 -20,000 were estimated to be in South Korea, 10,000 in the US, over 2,000 in Czech Republic<sup>5</sup> etc. This is a small number for other countries, but, a big number (almost 5% of the entire population) for a Mongolia with barely 2.6 million of population. Moreover, this number is increasing rapidly. Today, it is almost impossible to find a family in Ulaanbaatar, capital city of Mongolia that does not have a family member abroad.

Among migrants working abroad, proportion of women is high. For example, at the end of 2001, there were 976 Mongolians in the Czech Republic with valid work visas (thousands more were estimated to be otherwise living and working there) and 69% of them were women.<sup>6</sup> There is a trend that both males and females with higher education level were more likely to migrate and it is a loss for the national economy.

As most Mongolians go abroad without legal contract and language knowledge, they are engaged in low-wage jobs with insecure conditions and limited hygiene. For example, in South Korea, illegal migrants face exploitation for cheap labor and lack of medical care and insurance protection. Survey respondents of Status and Consequences of Mongolian Citizens Working Abroad (2005) enlisted advantages of their migration as getting acquainted with life in foreign countries,

<sup>5</sup> Status and Consequences of Mongolian Citizens Working Abroad: Survey Report, Ulaanbaatar 2005, pp. 10-11

<sup>6</sup> "The Times They Are A-Changing," *Sharing Experience: Migration Trends in Selected Applicant Countries and Lessons Learned from the 'New Countries of Immigration' in the EU and Austria*, Vienna: International Organization for Migration, 2004, <[http://www.iom.int/DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATION/EN/ION\\_II\\_CZ.pdf](http://www.iom.int/DOCUMENTS/PUBLICATION/EN/ION_II_CZ.pdf)>

living and working independently from parents, gaining work experience, acquiring a higher level of education and professional skills, saving money, raising children in better conditions, providing financial support for the family and making contributions to the development of Mongolia.<sup>7</sup> According to the calculations made by the Mongolian researcher Z. Otgon, 20,000 Mongolians residing in Seoul remit about US\$120 million in a year.<sup>8</sup> However, it should be noted that as in Mongolia, labor export started some time ago, there are no consolidated data on international remittances due to absence of official channels of transferring money. But, as Mongol Bank estimated that money inflow from abroad increased annually by 1.8% between 2002-2003, there should be a substantial share in GDP and balance of payment of the country.

Migrants also listed disadvantages, such as, loss of time for education, late marriage and child bearing, loss of professional skills, separation from the home country, homesickness and mental stress as consequence of abuse and threat.<sup>9</sup>

In some instances, women face more difficult conditions than men. According to survey among migrants in US, Czech Republic and South Korea, male migrants changed their jobs less frequently than female migrants did. Female respondents reported that they changed their work place because of harmful work environments, no work permits, visa expiration, employer attitude and hostile co-workers.<sup>10</sup>

Many women working abroad are married to foreigners and are getting easily involved into occasional sex relations and prostitution. Out of 500 couples registered their marriages in Ulaanbaatar National Wedding Palace in 2004, 80 were intermarriages.<sup>11</sup> Most of them or 20 Mongolian women married to the citizens of the Republic of Korea, 13 to the US citizens and others to the citizens of Great Britain, Japan, Germany, China, Holland, France and India. To compare with that, the marriages of Mongolian men with foreign women are less, just 1-2 cases in a year. However, not all intermarriages succeed due to unfamiliarity of each other's culture and mentality. As mentioned in Prof. Ryoko Imaoka's recent article,<sup>12</sup> in Seoul, Mongolian ladies married to Koreans founded an Association of Mongolian Wives and visit Mongolian Cultural Center in

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<sup>7</sup> Status and Consequences of Mongolian Citizens Working Abroad: Survey Report, Ulaanbaatar 2005, p. 76

<sup>8</sup> "Tsag ueiin medee" # 8, 2005, Seoul

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 45

<sup>11</sup> "Tsag ueiin medee" # 8, 2005, Seoul

<sup>12</sup> North Korea – Mongolia - South Korea: Women Network across the Borders by Ryoko Imaoka, 2005,

<http://www.geocities.co.jp/CollegeLife/4982/papers/fromnorth-eng>

Gwangnar for consultations as they have many problems due to unfamiliarity with Korean national customs and cuisine and it is hard for them to tolerate fierce teaching of their husbands and strict treatment from the side of their in-laws.

In addition, occasional sex relations and prostitution of women abroad increase risk of getting infected with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. From Internet sources, a Korean newspaper “The Chosun Ilbo” (2005/6/1) published about disclosure of 7 Mongolian girls of 20-ies suspected for working in a barber shop concurrently engaged in the prostitution. Some divorced women and girls used to work in Mongolia as prostitutes might be involved into sex works in Korea and other countries.

The above issue is leading to more serious circumstances such as being victims of human trafficking and crimes. In the narrative report by the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons, U.S. State Department (5 June 2006), Mongolia is identified as a source country for women and men trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced labor. Mongolian women are trafficked to China, Macau, South Korea, Turkey, Israel, Hungary, Poland and other East European countries, as well as France and Germany for commercial sexual exploitation; a small number of Mongolian women were also trafficked to Turkey and Israel.<sup>13</sup>

In late 2006, shocking news about murder of a young Mongolian lady was launched in Malaysia and Mongolia. A 28 year-old Mongolian lady Altantuya Shaariibuu was murdered near the city of Shah Alam, Malaysia in October 2006. Altantuya was an educated girl from a good family. Story behind her murder is that Altantuya met Abdul Razik Baginda, a defense analyst from the think-tank Malaysian Strategic Research Center in 2005 in Hong Kong and had a relationship with him for over two years. In October 2005, Altantuya arrived in Kuala Lumpur with her cousin to revive her relationship with Abdul Razdak Baginda. She went to her lover’s house, but was kidnapped and taken away. Police investigation reported the Mongolian lady was shot twice and her remains were found blown up with C4 explosives (very rarely used in murder body disposals in Malaysia and probably elsewhere throughout the world), and was only identified through DNA test of the bone fragments. The lover and three suspects (they were police personnel!) were arrested immediately.

There are people in Mongolia and elsewhere blaming Altantuya for trying to have an easy way of life and having a relationship with a cruel foreigner. But, she was a single mother with two

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.state.gov/g/tip/rls/tiprpt/2006/65989.htm>

children and a breadmaker for her family. Thus, if we look at this case from another side, Altantuya is victim of the Mongolian society which forces its ladies to shoulder all life burdens and sacrifice themselves to feed their children and families. Moreover, the latest findings from the murder investigation show that as Abdul Razdak Baginda was involved into arm trading business, he hired Altantuya during a bargaining to sell 3 sub-marines to France. It appears Abdul Razdak Baginda used to hire interpreters from developing countries in his deals of illegal arm trading and to remove them after the bargaining. Exact details of the murder are still under investigation.

## **Conclusion**

Although Mongolian women enjoy equal freedom and political, economic and social rights with men, their situation has been deteriorating during the 16 years of transition. The low level of employment, violence against women, a lack of political representation, and poverty are the most worrisome issues.

In Mongolia, in the years of transition, women have had a higher unemployment rate as they have lost jobs faster than men, remained unemployed for longer periods of time and had fewer job opportunities in both public and private sectors. With deterioration of social services and life overall, women's burdens and caring functions within the family have also substantially increased.

Low employment and increasing poverty force Mongolian women to migrate abroad along with men to seek employment and better life. Findings of surveys show that people migrate without legal contract and documents; thus, they spend much time to find jobs and do not have access to social service including health insurance. This kind of migration causing difficulties for women more than men as women are more prone to gender harassment and sexual exploitation. On the other hand, although, women are gaining money, experience, and education (getting specialized or at least, language knowledge) from their migration abroad, they are being under permanent stress and homesickness, having health problems because of difficult job, missing opportunity to get married and bear child, losing control of upbringing of their children at home, getting divorced because of being separated for a long period of time and so on.

In Mongolia, there is an ancient saying that distortion of women is a sign of nation's deterioration. Thus, the Mongolian state needs improvement in and reinforcement of its laws and policies toward women and elimination of gender disparities.

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