

CASE STUDY

Developing a Tool to Integrate Environmental Goals into National Sector Policies and Plans



There is rising concern over environmental problems associated with economic development, including air pollution. Photo credit: Eric Sales/ADB.

Policy makers need tools and approaches that help them understand and ensure the economic, social, and environmental symbiosis for sustainable development in Mongolia.

Overview

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) place equal emphasis on the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. It is therefore important for policies and plans, especially those in economic, social, and infrastructure-related sectors, to take into account their impact on the environment and vice versa at the time when they are formulated. Policy makers need tools and approaches that can help them understand and address the interlinkages within and between the economic, social, and environmental dimensions of the SDGs.

In 2019, supported by an Asian Development Bank technical assistance, the National Development Agency of Mongolia developed such a tool to help policy developers and planners in Mongolia ensure policy coherence and integration of environment goals into national sector policies and plans being developed.

Challenges

Mongolia shifted from a socialist to a market-based economy in 1990. Its economy has grown since 2010 with agriculture and mining as its largest economic sectors. Social and living conditions have improved. However, the country faces challenges in achieving equitable and sustainable development with many Mongolians still being left behind in this period of economic progress.

There is rising public concern over the environmental problems associated with this economic development. These include significant levels of air pollution in cities, destruction of land as a result of mining operations, overexploitation of natural resources, overgrazing and increased desertification, water shortages, poor sanitation, contamination of rivers and lakes, and land degradation.

Mongolia's 2019 Voluntary National Review showed that Mongolia's recent performance was poor in three of the major global sustainability-related indices: ecological footprint (2014), environmental well-being (2016), and environmental performance (2018). For Mongolia to achieve the SDGs, it is vital that their environmental dimensions are systematically integrated into the national development policy-making and planning processes.

Context

Mongolia has set ambitious targets under its Sustainable Development Vision (SDV) 2030, aspiring to join "leading middle-income countries based on per capita income by 2030." To realize these objectives, it aims to diversify the economy while promoting ecological balance and stable and democratic governance. It also recognizes the importance of "whole of government" and "whole of society" approaches to implementing the SDGs.

Mongolia's SDV 2030 targets a gross national income per capita of \$17,500 and an average annual economic growth of not less than 6.6% through 2030. The country wants to end poverty in all its forms, reduce income inequality, and have 80% of the population in the middle and upper-middle income group. Green development is also enshrined as a clear policy objective; it is also reflected in the specific green-economy-oriented 2014 Green Development Policy of Mongolia.

Actions to address environmental challenges have to be based on a common understanding of the SDGs and the SDV 2030. To reach agreed environmental goals, cooperation across sectors is required. The National Development Agency, which reports directly to the Prime Minister and is tasked to implement the SDGs in Mongolia, has assessed more than 200 existing national policies in relation to horizontal and vertical policy coherence with the SDGs and Mongolia's SDV 2030. The review showed the need to look at the economic and social impact of national sector policies and plans on the environment in

greater detail. The National Development Agency determined that a policy screening tool was needed to help integrate environment goals into national sector policies and plans in Mongolia. This needed to be a tool that could be directly applied to Mongolia and was easy to use.

Solutions

With the aim of helping to integrate the environmental dimensions of the SDGs into national sector policies and plans in Mongolia, the National Development Agency developed and tested a tool for policy developers and planners. The steps followed were:

- 1) Undertake a stocktake of existing tools and approaches being used in Mongolia and internationally (with reference to a regional tool compendium) for integrating the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development.
- 2) Develop a simple checklist tool that can be used to assess the integration of environment goals in national sector policies and plans.
- 3) Use the tool to assess the extent of integration of environmental goals in existing national policies in the energy and health sectors.

In developing the tool, the following selection/design criteria were adopted:

- Address the environmental dimensions of the SDGs, and in particular SDGs 6, 12 and 15, not forgetting infrastructure-related targets
- Be applicable to several, if not all, sectors of society
- Be easy to use even without detailed environmental knowledge
- Address integration of environmental goals into national sector policies and plans
- Be able to be used in the early stages of the policy and planning processes
- Help all stakeholders rethink nature as a crucial and valued asset
- Be able to be used or understood by non-governmental stakeholders

The first step was to develop an inventory of existing national and international tools and approaches to identify which could be used for policy screening in a Mongolian context. The main finding was that no one tool met all the selection/design criteria. However, a couple of tools were identified as the basis for continued work. One of these was the Bhutanese Gross National Happiness (GNH) Policy Screening Tool, which aims to “systematically assess the impacts of any policy and project on GNH.” GNH policies and projects take into account good governance, sustainable socio-economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation, among other things.

The National Development Agency harnessed some good qualities from the Bhutanese GNH Policy Screening Tool, and a filtration analysis tool that was previously used in developing the Green Development Policy of Mongolia, to develop its own tool. The simple checklist tool developed has kept the former’s simplicity and yet has the ability to determine:

- The impact the draft policy has on 48 environment-related and Mongolian-relevant SDG targets
- The impact each policy objective has on the environment-related and Mongolian-relevant SDG targets
- Whether overall the draft policy is compatible with the environmental dimensions of the SDGs

The draft tool was then tested against two existing national policies: the State Policy on Energy, 2015-2030 and the State Policy on Health, 2017-2026. As the test yielded good results, the draft tool was then presented and discussed in a national workshop held on 11 October 2019. Participants who represented government ministries and agencies, academia and civil society responded well to the draft tool which was then finalized.

Results

Reports presented the stocktake of tools and approaches and the simple checklist tool that will help policy developers and planners bring in the environmental dimensions of the SDGs to the policy development and planning processes at an early stage.

Developing the tool helped raise policy developers and planners awareness on the environmental dimensions of the SDGs and increase understanding of the interlinkages across the three sustainable development dimensions.

Lessons

The National Development Agency's active involvement in developing the tool was essential to the project's success. Focal points in government not only provided guidance on the current challenges with policymaking and policy coherence in the government so that the tool could help address current challenges and meet the needs of policy developers and planners.

The tool is intended for policy developers (analysts, formulators, drafters) and planners at line ministries and other government agencies. The main users of the tool include: policy makers, drafting committees, and the National Development Agency in its reviewing role. Secondary users include staff of other ministries and agencies expected to give feedback or inputs, businesses, civil society organizations and other stakeholders through the public engagement process. Accordingly, the tool itself and assessment results will need to be readily accessible during the public engagement process.

Resources

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Emma has over 20 years experience in the fields of environmental and sustainability assessment. Her current responsibilities include undertaking environmental safeguard compliance reviews for ADB projects, and managing preparation of the ADB Sustainability Report. Prior to ADB she worked in environmental consultancy, where she managed and coordinated environmental impact assessments,

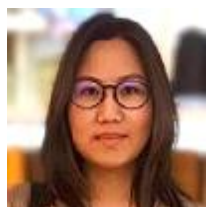
strategic environmental assessments and sustainability appraisals of policies, plans, and projects in the energy, water and urban sectors.



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Doljinsuren Jambal has worked with development partners and the Government of Mongolia for 21 years. She has knowledge and experience in the fields of national accounting, human development, sustainable development, development policy and planning and policy analysis. She obtained a Masters degree in Development Economics from the Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University in the Hague, The Netherlands in 2002.



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Suzanna Sumkhuu is a sustainability and development professional. She focuses on designing and executing policy coherence assessments, policy and institutional solutions for sustainable development, and localizing and mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals. She also has experience providing methodological analysis and inputs to the government on integrated policy planning. She is the Government of Mongolia's technical focal point for SDGs and voluntary national reviews.



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