

**The Gender Dimension of Economic Transition
in Mongolia**

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Introduction

The process of creating a market economy in former socialist countries has proved to be complex. The social costs of transition have been higher than anticipated. Mongolia has followed the pattern of abrupt transition seen in Eastern European countries and Russia rather than the gradualist approach of Asian centrally-planned economies in transition such as Lao PDR, Myanmar, China and Vietnam (Rana, 1995; Milanovic, 1998). Whereas the changes in Asian transitional economies appear to be motivated primarily by economic considerations, Mongolia's sudden political changes have been driven by dramatic economic shocks, external and internal. The social costs have been borne unevenly by different groups within Mongolia's population and social inequality is growing. One dimension of difference in this transition relates to gender.

Why does gender matter in economics? What gender-related issues have emerged as a result of transition in Mongolia? This chapter examines these two questions. It also introduces a macro-economic model which incorporates both the productive and reproductive economies and makes it possible to link economic objectives to social development ones.

Why does gender matter in economic analysis and planning?

Defining gender

Gender has been described as:

‘the social differentiation of women and men through processes which are learned, changeable over time and vary within and between cultures. At the economic level, gender appears as a sexual division of labour in which some types of work are strongly associated with women and some types with men. The costs and benefits of the sexual division of labour are unequally shared between men and women to the disadvantage of the latter’ (Elson, 1993, p. 237).

Gender relations affect social and economic functioning at all levels. Analysing gender issues involves examining women and men in terms of the roles they play in society,

‘roles which change as societies change ... Central to this analysis is the distinction between productive and reproductive roles, referring to production of goods and services and the social re-production of society over generations, and their relationship ... both roles are valuable and both can be performed by men and women alike’ (United Nations, 1995, p. ix).

The Mongolian language (unlike English) uses the same word for ‘gender’ and ‘sex’. Separation of the two meanings is fundamental in understanding of the concept of gender.

Gender as an economic issue

There is growing acceptance by development economists that gender needs to be an essential part of any analysis of economic development and policy formulation. Gender inequalities have often been treated separately as a social rather than an economic issue and as marginally related

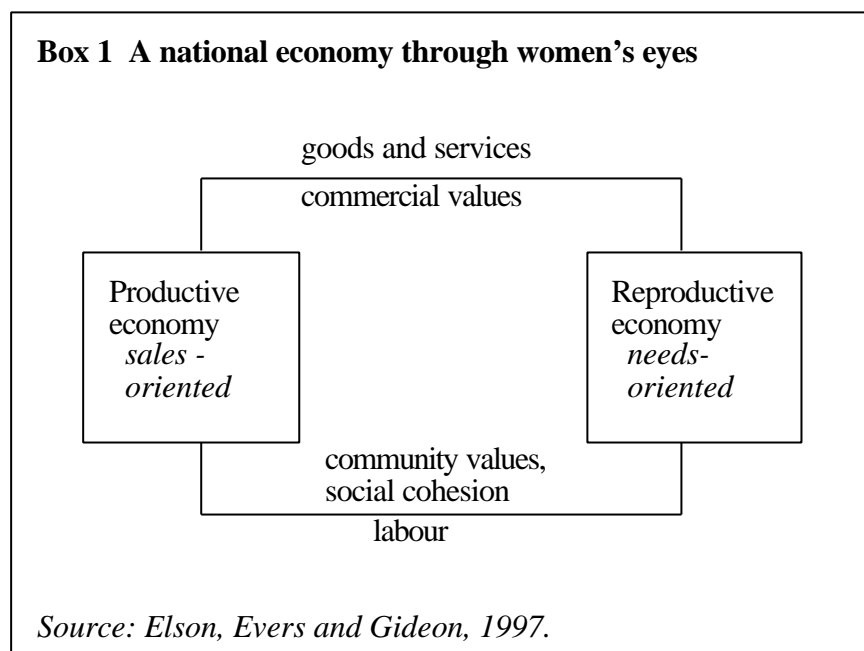
to economic development. Projects to redress gender imbalances have tended to be added on after economic development plans have begun implementation. However, gender inequality can be an obstacle to the achievement of many development goals. A focus solely on the productive economy (a market-based, sales-oriented economy) gives an imbalanced picture. Imbalance is likely to result in distortions in price and in patterns of resource allocation; it is also embodied in institutional barriers in governments, organisations and families.

Models of macro-economic analysis are often based on assumptions which have a gender bias and are constructed without any formal reference to human resources (Elson, 1991; Elson et al, 1997). The usual framework for analysing structural adjustment is constructed only in terms of categories of goods: tradables (such as crops and manufactured products) and non-tradables (such as construction, subsistence agriculture or public services like education). The missing dimension in this approach is an examination of the reproductive economy, one based on family and community and organised at the micro-level through households and inter-household networks. The reproductive economy supplies labour to the productive economy and transmits community values and social cohesion. It provides essential input (labour) to the productive economy and maintains the well-being of the population on a daily basis through activities such as housework, food preparation and care. However this is generally unpaid work and usually not measured in terms of market value of the services provided (Elson et al, 1997). Women's work as a consequence remains 'invisible' in production statistics.

Though both men and women work in both economies, the productive and the reproductive, the productive economy tends to be relatively male-intensive and the reproductive female-intensive. This has implications for the gender division of income and work and gives males and females different access to the opportunities provided by public services and markets. Gender barriers to the reallocation of labour are likely to result in unemployment for men and extra work for women as job-work is added to unpaid domestic work (Elson, 1991, p. 175). Paid and unpaid work compete for women's time in economic transition and there is pressure on women to increase both their paid and unpaid labour input.

Structural adjustment is usually depicted as a transition which changes the relative prices of these two categories of goods, switching resources from the production of non-tradable to tradable goods. However, this kind of model ignores the human resource dimension (the utilisation and reproduction of human resources) of the transition process. It confines itself to the productive economy, that is, a market-based, sales-oriented economy. Macro-economic models which ignore the re-productive dimension are 'treating labour as if it were a non-produced natural resource' (Elson, 1991, p. 175) and presenting a distorted analysis and basis for planning.

What kind of model then is appropriate? It needs to be one which incorporates and inter-relates the productive and reproductive economies. Such a model is provided in Box 1.



Working from this model it is possible to link economic development objectives to social development objectives. It permits the development of macro-economic strategies which maximise positive interactions between the two sets of objectives and minimise the negative instead of leaving social development objectives out of the economic equation. From this, gender issues become more apparent and highlight gender constraints on economic development.

Gender-aware economic analysis is important for reasons of efficiency and equality. It can be argued that the failure to share more evenly, by gender, the costs and opportunities of the transition process will be costly for society as a whole in terms of its growth prospects for three reasons:

- the legitimacy of the new political system can be questioned on the grounds of inequity as reflected in new laws and institutions;
- a major part of the skilled and well-educated human resource will be wasted;
- heavy female losses will have strong spill-over effects on social cohesion and stability (UNDP, 1997a).

Before examining how the costs and opportunities of transition are shared between men and women in Mongolia, it is worth turning to other transitional economies for comparison.

Gender in transitional economies

A review of transition to a market economy in more than 20 countries in Eastern Europe and central Asia shows similar broad trends for the whole population: dramatic short-term falls in incomes, production and welfare levels (UNDP, 1997a).

Within these trends some gender differences are visible though their extent varies according to country-specific factors, such as the strength or weaknesses of women's political organisations, the employment structure, levels of wages, the nature of government-financed social infrastructure and services, and particular cultural value systems and attitudes in relation to

gender. Overall, transition to a market economy has resulted in a widening of gender differences in the spheres of politics, the economy and social life.

Since the early 1990s, female participation in political life has declined and women are 'practically invisible as partners in setting new "rules of the game"' (UNDP, 1997a, p. 14). The position of women in the labour market has deteriorated. In most of the countries reviewed, women have lost jobs faster than men, remained unemployed for longer periods of time, and had fewer job opportunities in the private sector. Women have had a higher unemployment rate than men (overall, 6 percent higher) and lower levels of wages (women received, on average, 75 percent of the wage paid to men for the same job). Reductions in employment and pay have resulted in greater dependence on government benefits though these have been eroding rapidly in all the countries. Women's caring functions within the family have also increased substantially at the same time as their incomes and available social services have declined. The number of women living in poverty has increased 'reaching dramatic proportions in some countries and regions' (UNDP, 1997a, p.14). Overall, there has been a deterioration of women's status.

Are similar changes to be found in Mongolia? What was the situation and status of women in Mongolia before transition?

Women in pre-transition Mongolia

Before 1921, Mongolia was a feudal society where women had limited rights, especially during the Manchu period. The 1921 revolution and the establishment of a socialist society from 1924 onwards radically changed the position of women. It gave them increased access to education and health care and equal rights within the law.

Education

In education, a high rate of female participation and equality with males was achieved, higher than in most other Asian countries. In 1921, the first literacy school for women was set up for 20 students in Ulaanbaatar. By 1931, about 40 percent of the children enrolled in primary schools was female. By the late 1980s, primary school enrollment for the population was almost universal and a system of boarding schools provided access to secondary education for rural boys and girls. By 1969, 75 percent of females had received some form of education and by 1989, about 95 percent had. The opening of the State University in 1942 gave men and women alike the opportunity for higher education. During the socialist period literacy levels rose and the gap between male and female literacy rates narrowed from about 16 percent in 1963 to below 3 percent in 1989. Literacy is defined and measured differently in different countries. In the absence of surveys and direct testing, the proxy variable of years of primary schooling tends to be used, sometimes leading to an overestimate of literacy rates. The indicator on which Mongolia's literacy rate is based is four years of schooling.

Table 1. Literacy rates

Literacy rates of the population aged 10 years and above, 1963-89				
(percentages)				
<i>Year</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
1963	72.6	80.5	64.8	
1969	82.1	88.9	75.3	
1979	93.3	96.5	90.2	
1989	97.0	98.4	95.7	

Source: National Statistical Office, Literacy and Education of Mongolia's Population, 1997

Health care

In health care, medical services were provided by the state for men and women alike throughout the county at *sum* (local district) level. Improved health care during the socialist period resulted in a large increase in life-expectancy rates between the 1920s and 1990, rising by six years between 1960 and 1990. The different needs of males and females were reflected in the provision made for maternal and child health; pre-natal rest-homes were set up in all *sums* and maternity leave was generous. Over 90 percent of rural women gave birth in hospitals. This provision resulted in a decrease in maternal death rates from 170 per 100,000 live births in 1970 to 120 in 1990, and a decrease in infant mortality.

Decision-making and public life

The socialist period saw an increase in female participation in decision-making and public life. In 1925, the first women were appointed to positions in local government and in 1929, one was appointed as a member of the People's Supreme Court. In 1931, 30 percent of local government officials, including two *aimag* (provincial) governors, were women. Later on, quotas of female representation were legally guaranteed in parliament, in ministerial posts and at government and *aimag* levels, though there were proportionately fewer women than men to be found in the most senior posts.

Employment

Employment was guaranteed by the state for both men and women (communist ideology held labour to be a duty of all citizens) and conditions were established to enable women to undertake work outside the home. These included the provision of kindergartens and day nurseries in both cities and rural communities, and state support for the care of the elderly and disabled (usually the responsibility of women rather than men). At the same time, an official list of jobs and standards for women (prepared in 1964 and 1985) drew a distinction between men's and women's work in the employment structure. Pay was similar for men and women and wage differences were small, characteristic of the compressed wage scales of socialist economies though difference operated through the allocation of additional rewards, benefits and privileges. Wages were centrally controlled and remained little changed throughout the 1980s — monthly wages in the material sector rose only from an average of 526 tugriks in 1981 to 568 tugriks in 1989.

By the late 1980s, women in Mongolia had achieved a measure of equality and education greater than many other Asian countries. How has this been affected by the move to a market economy? What gender-related changes have resulted from the transition?

The following sections examine gender differences in relation to work, education, health, poverty and decision-making. However, researching these topics has presented some

difficulties because the data available has limitations, gaps and inconsistencies, and does not always provide comparable data for males. Much data from official and published sources is aggregated (not distinguishing between male and female), a fact which in itself suggests that gender issues have not altogether been explicitly recognised or addressed in economic planning though this is changing now.

Box 2 Female population in Mongolia 1998

1,198,217 females (50.4 percent of the total population of 2,179,576)

Age structure of the female population

11 percent (132,411) over the age of 50.

42 percent (504,879) aged between 20 and 49

47 percent (560,927) aged 19 or below

36 percent (430,997) aged 14 or below

Total urban population 1,252,300 (52.0 percent)

Total rural population 1,134,700 (47.5 percent)

Life expectancy: females 65.4 years, males 62.1 years.

Number of female-headed households (1997):

51,732 (14.7 percent of all households).

Source: National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 1998; UNDP, 1997a

Gender and work

For men and women alike, the rapid transition from guaranteed employment in a command economy to an uncertain infant market economy with formal and informal labour in state and private sectors, has presented major changes for working lives. The picture is a complex one since the status of employed, unemployed, self-employed, and informal sector worker may overlap. There is difficulty in defining 'unemployed'. Official figures refer only to those who register as unemployed but some unemployed do not register because the benefits of registering are slight. Also, many who do register continue to carry out small private enterprises in order to generate income. One survey reported that 63 percent of those officially unemployed were engaged in informal sector activities (Women's Information and Research Centre, 1998). This should be borne in mind when looking at the employment data (1993-97) in Table 2.

Table 2. Employment status by sex, per thousand, 1993-97

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Population of working age					
Total	1,133.6	1,165.7	1,186.7	1,212.8	1,229.6
Female	570.0 (50.3%)	581.0 (49.8%)	590.0 (49.7%)	600.0 (49.4%)	612.0 (49.7%)
Economically active population					
Total	847.7	861.4	839.8	847.2	842.9
Female	412.0 (48.7%)	512.0 (59.4%)	488.0 (58.1%)	415.0 (48.9)	420.0 (49.8%)
Of which employed					
Total	772.8	786.5	794.7	791.8	779.2
Female	377.0 (48.8%)	471.0 (59.9%)	465.0 (58.5%)	387.0 (48.9%)	387.0 (49.7%)
Of which unemployed					
Total	71.9	74.9	45.1	55.4	63.7
Female	35.4 (49.2%)	40.3 (53.8%)	23.6 (52.3%)	28.1 (50.7%)	32.6 (51.1%)
Labour force participation rate					
Total	74.5%	73.9%	70.8%	69.9%	68.6%
Female	72.3%	88.1%	82.7%	69.3%	68.5%
Employment population ratio					
Total	68.2%	67.5%	67.0%	65.3%	63.4%
Female	66.1%	81.1%	78.7%	64.6%	63.2%
Unemployment rate					
Total	8.5%	8.7%	5.4%	6.5%	7.6%
Female	8.6%	7.9%	4.8%	6.8%	7.8%

Source: National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 1998; authors' own calculations

As Table 2 shows, females have a slightly higher but similar unemployment rate to males. It is higher for three out of the five years given but the difference in male-female unemployment rates is small (an average of 0.4 per cent compared to the average of 6.0 percent for other transitional countries referred to earlier). The rates of female unemployment are in fact similar to those in Western countries but those for male unemployment are higher.

A worldwide trend is for female labour force participation rates to move closer to those of males although there are still significant differences between male and female work by sector, occupation and type. Female labour force participation is strongly influenced by gender differences in the definition of work in different countries, particularly in the informal sector and in agriculture, where it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between women's housework and unpaid work (World Bank, 1998, p. 61). In general, women tend to be in the minority in industry but occupy a high proportion of service jobs. The greater availability of part-time work in service jobs attracts more women who often have less opportunity to receive training for changing employment. Are these general trends to be found in Mongolia?

As can be seen in Table 3, women in Mongolia predominate in some occupations (services, finance and trade) and men in others (industry, construction, telecommunications and transport). Women have also moved into new areas of employment such as finance and real estate.

Table 3 Female employment (1997)

<i>Sector</i>	<i>Percentage of female employees</i>
Hotels and catering	79.8
Education	66.3
Health and social services	64.9
Financial institutions	61.2
Trade (wholesale and retail)	54.2
Public services	50.3
Agriculture and hunting	46.8
Real estate	45.0
Civil service and armed forces	42.4
Industry	
Processing	41.2
Electricity and natural gas	34.9
Mining	30.3
Construction	39.6
Telecommunications and transport	38.5

Source: National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 1998.

While women predominate in numbers in some sectors, they are likely to be in the minority in senior positions or management roles (Table 4). Where employment is within the state sector (such as education, healthcare and social services) retrenchment of staff, as sector budgets have been cut, has affected women more than men as a result of the composition of the labour force.

Table 4 Male-female position in the labour hierarchy

<i>Levels</i>	<i>Male (percent)</i>	<i>Female (percent)</i>
Decision-making	13.0	6.8
Executive	37.4	43.8
Assistant	49.6	49.2

Source: Women's Information and Research Centre, 1998.

Some useful clues to the nature of male and female employment are offered by a survey of over 3,800 men and women in Ulaanbaatar and four *aimags* (Women's Information and Research Centre, 1998). It showed that more people worked in the state sector than the private sector (51.7 percent); women were 55.8 of those employed in the state sector and 46.2 percent of those in the private sector. A substantial proportion of those surveyed had changed their jobs since 1990: 63.3 per cent of males and 52.0 per cent of females had been in their present jobs for less than four years. Women had stayed longer in their jobs than men but had fewer permanent contracts (81 percent of females, 87 percent of males). Temporary contracts were most common in the private sector: 8.5 percent of the men and 9.8 percent of the women had them (75 of those for women were with private companies). Temporary contracts have advantages and disadvantages for women. On the one hand, they may create job opportunities and help provide work which fits in with the family demands and responsibilities experienced by

women. On the other, such work may fail to carry social insurance and benefits to be found in longer-term work and is more insecure. The conditions of employment may be less favourable too: poor pay, unpaid overtime, lack of compliance with health and security regulations or irregular payments. A further disadvantage for women, reported in this survey, was that they were sometimes required to relinquish rights to maternity entitlements in order to get the job. Of those working in the private sector, 40 percent of the women said they were interested in changing their jobs if they could.

Women as entrepreneurs

If employment opportunities in the state sector are limited, what scope do women have to set up their own enterprises? One survey of 482 SMEs (Small and Medium Sized Enterprises employing between 1 and 21 people) reported that one third of entrepreneurs were female. The proportion of women was higher in very small companies of 1-5 people, (38 percent of all the SMEs) but decreased with the increasing size of the company. It appears that, as the company grew, female participation as enterprise owners or managers did not grow at the same rate. In trade and industry, more men than women were entrepreneurs. In trade, 20 percent of entrepreneurs were female, in industry, 25 percent. A larger proportion of female entrepreneurs (35 percent) worked in the service sector (Koch, 1997).

Another survey in Ulaanbaatar and *aimags* found that 26.2 percent of private enterprise owners were women (Women's Information and Research Centre, 1998). However, women's activity as entrepreneurs is reportedly linked to their access to loans and credit and the availability of micro-credit schemes. Their access to these has been less than men's. Reasons appears to be the disparity in formal asset ownership by males and females, lack of sufficient 'women-friendly' loan schemes and insufficient knowledge about them.. Access to loan schemes is improving slowly (for example, as part of Mongolia's Poverty Alleviation Programme) but access to loans is not enough by itself. Information, education, advice and local support on how to use and repay them are needed, especially for poorer women. This is one aspect of a broader need by the whole population for education about the market economy.

Women in the informal sector

The informal sector economy has grown as opportunities in the state sector have diminished and as the need to supplement wages has become essential for family survival. Informal sector activities are small-scale, usually family-based, and are under-counted in official statistics. This sector covers a range of income-generating activities and includes small traders (such as kiosk sellers and market traders), taxi drivers, handicraft producers and service providers. A study in Ulaanbaatar (the capital city) concluded that the informal sector employed 30-35 percent of the city's workforce (Anderson, 1997). Women are heavily engaged in the informal sector though there is little data available on the extent. Women with full-time jobs also work in the informal sector. According to one survey, 42.8 percent of women were self-employed in *aimags*, 36.8 percent in *sums*, and 34.8 per cent in Ulaanbaatar (Women's Information and Research Centre, 1998).

There are some differences in the nature of male and female work in the informal sector. In Ulaanbaatar, women worked mostly as kiosk sellers (63.4 per cent), street vendors (51.3 percent) and as market traders (47.5 percent). Few worked as taxi-drivers (less than 10 per cent), presumably because mostly men control the use of cars which were not available for private ownership until after 1990 (car ownership carries high status). Taxi drivers could earn more than kiosk sellers or market traders and also had a higher proportion of second jobs than

them (Anderson, 1997). Another finding relates to levels of earnings: fewer women than men in the informal sector earned more than 80,000 tugriks a month: 1 in 12 women compared to 1 in 5 men (Women's Information and Research Centre, 1998).

Women and privatisation

Privatisation in Mongolia has been rapid and has created gender differences in two main respects: in employment opportunities and in the acquisition of assets.

Privatisation and job-losses in the service sectors have tended to affect women more than men because of the composition of the labour force. Especially in *aimags* and *sums*, opportunities for female employment have reduced as a result of cuts in rural services. More employment in the private sector is available in urban than rural areas (Women's Information and Research Centre, 1998). The private sector seems to offer some promise for female employment because the main flow of investment at present is going toward infrastructure and heavy industry sectors such as construction, mining and mineral resource exploration — sectors traditionally offering less opportunity for female employment. The private sector can also, in some cases, offer higher salaries, higher than those paid to teachers and other government employees. However it can also mean unequal pay. One study of 144 micro-enterprises and small business in manufacturing, services, trade, agriculture and transportation sectors found that in all cases but one, the average female wage was lower than that for males (Asian Development Bank, 1996).

In acquiring assets from the privatisation of state-ownership, women appear to have benefited less than men. Assets, when distributed as part of the privatisation process, were registered in the names of heads of households, predominantly men (90 percent). As a result, women need the consent of heads of households (usually husbands) to offer assets as a guarantee for loan or credit. Where the (male) head of household is also seeking loans for private enterprise, women's claims tend to take lower priority. The issue of rights over assets is also a problem for divorcing couples (divorce has increased since 1990); new legislation is planned to reduce this inequality. In the circumstances, the lack of micro-credit aimed specifically at women has hampered their entry into full-time business. Opportunities are now increasing because of government and non-governmental initiatives.

A similar problem exists for urban and rural women. In one survey, women were 45.2 percent of those whose principal occupation was herding (Women's Information and Research Centre, 1998). The distribution of livestock and equipment from collectives was based on the number of family members and status in the herding collective. Again, assets have mostly been registered in the names of male heads of households and there is some report that single women herders received less than their entitlement in the distribution of assets resulting from privatisation. As a result, female-headed families with young children are likely to have small, often unviable, herds and to fall into the lowest band of rural poor (Skapa and Benwell, 1996).

Women and the rural economy

Transition has affected the working lives of rural and urban women in different ways. Nomadic households are units of both the productive and reproductive economies. Households are internally differentiated with rights and responsibilities divided by gender. Tradition in nomadic herding life reflects clear distinctions between men's and women's work domains. Privatisation has affected these in two opposing directions. On the one hand it is blurring some distinctions between men's and women's work as, with the increase in herd size and combination of animals, women take on new tasks dealing with animals. On the other, traditional work divisions are often strongly adhered to though the volume of productive and reproductive work

has increased. Changes in herd composition, from single species to mixed species of animals in order to maximise self-sufficiency and minimise risk, have increased the demand for labour to manage them. Women and children (especially boys) have taken on some of this additional work, previously the domain of men. The increase in milk production from expanded herds has produced more work in processing milk products, traditionally women's work in the *ger*. This has considerable implications for family economy:

‘When pointing to herding skills and techniques as a crucial factor for the wealth of a household, which is much dependent on its male members, it must be emphasised that the labour available on the female side is an equally crucial factor for herd growth. There is a clear limit to the number of animals a woman can milk and how much milk she can process. Because these daily routine jobs are the exclusive responsibility of the woman, their labour is in fact the first limitation to herd expansion beyond the customary (Bruun, 1996, p. 84).

The nomadic economy is based more on barter and less on cash than the urban economy. Additional milk production and processing does not necessarily generate increased cash income, because of poor access to markets and the fact that milk products are low value goods, unlike cashmere.

In addition to increased demand for labour from herding, increased labour is needed to compensate for the reduction in local services and products, formerly provided by the state and available for purchase or as payment in kind. This has required more self reliance in families. For women, it has involved making more household food items such as bread, and a return to traditional crafts making clothes, boots and felt for tents. Productive and reproductive work have increased for herder women. The scope and volume of herder women's work has increased, lengthening the (already long) working day more than for men. Their labour appears to be over-utilised though no systematic time-use studies are available (nor for urban women too). There is, however, a variety of indirect evidence. For example, lack of time for learning was reported as a problem for herding women in participating in a non-formal education project in the Gobi *aimags*. Listening to the early morning radio programme (part of the project) was not possible because they had to milk animals; some women said the men and children in the family listened for them and took notes for them, rather than doing the milking for them (Robinson, 1996).

Women and family income

Whichever way women earn their income, they are increasingly important contributors to family income, partly because two incomes have become essential for a basic standard of living for a family. Full-time employment for the head of household does not ensure that the family will stay above the poverty line. Relationships are changing in relative incomes within families. Though the traditional perception of males as the main bread-winners remains unchanged in many ways, the reality is changing. According to one survey 36.0 of women are generating a significant part of the family income: 33.1 percent reported earning the major part of it, and 25.6 percent an amount equal to their husband's (Women's Information and Research Centre, 1998). The control over family income is an area for research.

Gender and education

Every citizen has the right to free primary and secondary education, according to Mongolia's constitution though the indirect and direct costs of education to households are rising. The education sector has been hard hit by the economic transition. Expenditure per capita on

education fell by 53 percent between 1991-96. Differences have emerged in participation rates of boys and girls and between rich and poor *aimags*, rich and poor families, and urban and rural children.

The gender disparity in education has widened to the disadvantage of boys, particularly in rural areas where their labour is needed for herding. From 1989 to 1995, enrolment rates overall fell from 98 percent to 84 percent in primary schools, and from 65 percent to 54 percent in secondary schools. In 1996, net primary school enrolment rates were 93.8 female and 92.9 male. At secondary school level, net enrolment rates were 65.5 percent female and 49.1 percent male (UNDP, 1997b). Cohort survival rates at the end of the primary cycle have declined to 80 percent. Participation rates favour girls increasingly as they progress from Grade 1 to Grades 8 or 10. The net enrolment rate in secondary education (1996) for rural boys was 41.6 percent for boys and 58.3 percent for girls. In 1996, 48,435 school-age children were out of school; of these, 20,660 (42.6 percent) were girls and 27,835 (57.4 percent) boys. The school drop-out rate is high, reaching over 25 percent at its worst point but now reducing. About 80 percent of out-of-school children work in agricultural activities, usually herding animals.

In terms of education staff, female teachers are in the majority (75 percent), though the majority of school principals and directors of aimag education administration are male (3 out of 22 education centre directors in 1998 are female). Teachers' pay, like that of all government employees, is low (the equivalent of 25-45 USD per month).

The trend for more females to take up educational opportunity increases at higher levels of education. Higher education has expanded since 1993-4 (by 1997, there were over 36,000 full-time students). The public sector has grown by 46 percent and the private sector has doubled despite the introduction of student fees in 1995 and the transfer of costs to students. Public universities now receive only 10 percent of their funding from government. In contrast to other Asian countries, female students far outnumber males in Mongolia: 68 percent of students at public universities and 71 percent at private universities are female. However, this picture reverses itself for university staff, especially at senior levels. University teachers are predominantly male, except for teacher education and business studies courses. The proportion of female students at post-graduate level is much lower than for first degree courses (Weidman, 1998).

The trend is for males to enter the labour market earlier than girls. In the future, if the present pattern continues, levels of literacy and educational qualifications are likely to be higher for females than for males. This has implications for future labour markets and gender equity.

Pre-school education provision

One factor affecting women's ability to participate in the labour market is the availability of child-care. Places in nursery and kindergarten schools have reduced since 1990 and only 20 percent of children are provided with places. More are available through fee-paying but many women and families cannot afford these. In 1990, 118,800 children were in 1,350 pre-school education facilities, but by 1996, the number had dropped to 68,000 and half the facilities had closed (Table 5).

Table 5 Pre-school institutions, 1990-96

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Number of pre-school institutions	1,350	1,297	1,023	841	767	711	705
Nursery	441	414	217	118	71	51	38
Kindergarten	909	883	806	723	696	660	667
Total enrolled (thousands)	118.8	116.6	97.6	67.1	65.7	68.1	70.3
Nursery	21.6	20.9	11.9	7.2	4.7	4.0	2.3
Kindergarten	97.2	95.7	85.7	59.9	61.0	64.1	68.0

Source: National Statistical Office 1997.

Continuing education for adults

Transition to a market economy has also created needs for new kinds of education and training, formal and non-formal, for adults. Transition requires policy-makers to re-think educational provision, priorities, delivery systems and use of limited finance in times of budget cuts. It provides an opportunity for innovation. One major initiative in non-formal education was the Gobi Women's project, targeted at nomadic and rural women since they were identified as a particularly vulnerable group in the move to a market economy. This project was funded by Danish Government aid and implemented by UNESCO in partnership with the Government of Mongolia. The project provided non-formal education for 16,000 women in six Gobi aimags through a system of distance education using print, radio, local learning groups and travelling tutors. The content was on income-generation, handicraft production, food-processing, healthcare, animal care, family planning and doing business in a market economy. Learning was located in the family and community context and much activity took place at the local level, supported by local committees. Evaluation of the project showed that it was an effective way of disseminating information and of supporting local learning groups and individual women, reaching remote people dispersed over large distances and generating centres of activity in *sums*. Though one goal of the project was income-generation, it was more successful in achieving income-stretching than income-generation. However, some women did begin to trade and barter more, for example, making a camel saddle which could be traded for one camel or a few sheep (Robinson, 1996).

Women and reproductive health

All health services deteriorated after 1990 and real per capita expenditure on health reduced by 42 per cent in the early 1990s. Mortality rates have increased for males and females, higher for males than female, even for males from age thirty onwards. Following transition there has been a decline in nutrition and dietary balance, availability of safe water and sanitary services, and an increase in sedentary life style.

High maternal death rates are identified by the World Health Organisation as an indicator of gender inequality. From 1990 onwards, there was a decline in maternal health care and facilities and an increase in maternal malnutrition, protein deficiency, and post-delivery toxemia, all leading in turn to an increase in birth complications, post-natal anaemia, premature birth and infant malnutrition and mortality. The maternal mortality rate doubled between 1990 and 1994; the rate for 1997 has returned to near pre-transition levels of 140 per 100,000 births in 1985-89 (Table 6).

Table 6 Maternal mortality rate per 100,000 live births, 1992-97.

Year	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Maternal mortality rate	200	240	212	185	176	143

Source: *Source: National Statistical Office*

There is some regional variation in maternal mortality. It is twice as high in rural as in urban areas, partly due to the rise of home deliveries resulting from the decline in local services (the maternal mortality rate is higher for home deliveries). By 1993, only 52 out of 187 maternity centres were functioning. This increased to 151 in 1994, but was still only half the number functioning in 1989. By 1996, there were 269 maternity centres helped by a grant from UNFPA though 175 of these were judged to be inadequate in quality.

By contrast, infant mortality rates have fallen during the 1990s by just under a third, but this apparent reduction is likely to be due to a decrease in recording births and deaths, as women's contact with health services has grown less, especially in rural areas. Infant mortality rates vary throughout the country according to location (rural and urban) and social groups:

‘A child born in Ulaanbaatar, to a mother with tertiary education, aged between 24-34 years, living in an apartment with tap water has the best survival chances’ (UNDP, 1997b, p.16).

In order to improve health services, a reform of the health service is in progress, switching priorities from highly specialised healthcare and large urban-based hospitals to more local, family-doctor based, primary healthcare services and health promotion rather than disease treatment.

Family planning and birth control

During socialist times, abortion or abstinence from sex were the main means of birth control. In 1943, abortion was made legal for women with serious health problems; in 1985 this was relaxed to include abortion on a wider range of health and social grounds, and relaxed further as a result of a Family Planning Policy introduced in 1989. This and the removal of obstacles to the importing and sale of contraceptives, resulted in a decrease in fertility rates and reduction in family size to an average of 2-3 children. During the centrally-planned economy, the government had encouraged large families as a matter of policy but this is no longer the case and economic hardship has also affected family size.

There is a high rate of abortion (336 reported per 1,000 in 1995) and low use of preventative methods of family planning. The demand from women for contraceptives and information about them is high. Sex education is seldom, if ever, taught in schools and only to a very limited extent within families (it has been unusual for mothers and daughters to speak of such ‘taboo’ subjects, especially in rural areas). During the 1990s, there has been an increase in unmarried mothers (now 12-13 percent of mothers giving birth). Birth control within Mongolian society is most often seen as the female's responsibility and condom use is low. About 30 percent of reproductive-age women use contraceptives, and of these, 80 percent use Intra-Uterine Devices. During transition, sexually-transmitted diseases have increased and their incidence is probably under-recorded. The low level of condom use increases the vulnerability of the population to the HIV virus though the number of known cases so far is very small. The

responsibility for family planning and sexual health tends to be seen as belonging to females rather than shared with males, and education and awareness-raising programmes for males have been few. Inequality in allocation of responsibility for sexual health is illustrated by an attempt in September 1997, by the city authorities in Ulaanbaatar, to impose compulsory HIV testing for all females in the city between the ages of 15 and 40, though not for males.

Gender and poverty

Poverty is a new phenomenon in post-1990 Mongolia. Loss of employment, high inflation and erosion of real earnings created new problems for households and caused many to fall below the poverty line. At the same time, the social safety-nets of socialist times fell away because of the lack of state funding. Taken together these circumstances resulted in the rise of poverty, a reduction in education and health care provision, a rise in malnutrition and social problems such as homeless children ('street children'), alcoholism, family violence and prostitution. Groups vulnerable to poverty in Mongolia have been identified as orphans, female-headed households, the elderly without family, the physically handicapped, households with more than four children, the unemployed, and herders with small numbers of animals in remote areas (UNDP, 1997b, p.13).

It is estimated that around 36 percent of the population in Mongolia is living below the defined poverty line though in some areas this proportion may be higher. Single heads of households, particularly women, are identified as a vulnerable group, especially if they have children. This matches a global study which concluded that, throughout the world, 'the strongest link between gender and poverty is found in female-headed households, which are a significant source of female poverty' (UN, 1995, p. xii). The number of female-headed households in Mongolia was 51,732 in 1997 (14.7 percent of the total), a large increase compared to 19,289 (4.5 percent of the total) in 1990. A quarter of them have six or more children and half belong to the poorest group in the population. The proportion of female heads of families with children under the aged of 16 is increasing among the poor. Female heads of poor families include a high proportion of widows: 65-80 percent of all deaths in the age group 20-29 are male. It is also the case that many more households function in practice as female-headed households in cases where the men are unemployed or are unable to work because of ill-health or alcoholism.

One factor in female poverty is that women are more likely to lose their jobs when firms reduce employee numbers. The Pensions Law (1990 amendment) legislated that women with four or more children could be pensioned off from work on the grounds of being occupied in 'social care'. Although the law states that this is to be by agreement, it has made such women vulnerable to job-losses. In 1994, 55.8 percent of all 'retired' women of working age were those who were pensioned off because of the number of their children. Alongside this has been reduction in the social services which enabled women to work: state funded kindergartens, child-care and nurseries in urban and rural areas. Government allowances to the elderly and disabled have been eroded by inflation, increasing their dependence for care on their families, in practice mostly on women. The existing Maternal and Infant Law provides benefits for employed women who are pregnant: 101 days maternity leave with 400 tugriks a day, plus two years of child-care leave with no pay (but with social benefits allowance), during which time their jobs are retained for them. However, this entitlement is seen by employers as a hazard in employing them. Particularly in the private sector, some employers are reluctant to comply with this and try to avoid employing young married women.

Gender, decision-making and public affairs

The Constitution of Mongolia states equal rights for men and women. The law formally reflects the equality of women developed during socialist times and there are provisions for equal opportunity in education, employment and financial assistance for childbirth. However, women's role and visibility in public affairs has significantly reduced since 1990 (Ginsburg and Gansorig, 1996). Following the national elections in 1992, the gender imbalance became more marked. Women's representation in parliament dropped from 25 per cent to 4 percent, rising later to 8 percent after the 1996 elections. During socialist times, a quota system for female representation had operated but this ceased after 1990, and though some women now advocate its return, others oppose it. In all government departments there are numbers of women to be found but mainly in lower positions. Given the level of women's education, deficiencies in education background cannot be a reason for this.

Box 3 Women and political decision-making in 1997

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Female</i>
Members of Parliament	76	7 (9.9 percent)
Cabinet members	9	0
State Secretaries	9	0
Aimag, City, Sum and District Governors	373	9 (2.4 percent)
Diplomatic Ambassadors	28	0
Chairpersons of aimag and city assemblies (hurals)	22	0

Source: Women's Information and Research Centre, 1997

In economic decision-making, female participation at the policy-making level appears to be small. Economic decision-makers are people in a variety of positions who determine economic policy, long-term and short-term. Decision-makers include managers of public and private enterprises, managers of financial institutions, entrepreneurs, executives of public bodies dealing with economic matters, members of the board of professional and business organisations, and senior trade union officials. The extent of female participation in this is unknown at present and is a topic for research, to examine the relative participation and power of males and females at macro-, meso- and micro-economic levels.

In professional fields, though women are present, their positions within the power structure overall is lower than men's. Their share of administrative and managerial posts was the same in 1989 as in 1995, that is, 18.7 percent (UNDP, 1997b, p.65). This inequity cannot be attributed to lower educational levels than males (except for lower proportions of females at post-graduate degree levels). Other factors appear to be at work, interpreted by women as discrimination by gender.

In developing female human resource to achieve equity and economic growth, the need for targeted support to women was recognised by the government through its National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women. This was approved by the Government of Mongolia in 1996, following the Beijing Conference for the Advancement of Women in 1995. It is being implemented by both government and non-governmental organisations but its implementation has been slow. A number of recent initiatives have been taken by various agencies to speed up the advancement of women.

Before 1990, there was only one women's organisation. Since then, a number of government and non-governmental initiatives have developed. There are at present about thirty women's organisations, undertaking a variety of activities to promote women's interests and making a contribution to policy development. At local government level, officers have been given the responsibility for the welfare of 'women, youth and families' though there is still a need to strengthen the national system for dealing with gender issues.

Box 4 Women in professions

Women in science

In 1996, females formed the following percentages:

47.8 of all staff in scientific research organisations

3.7 of leading researchers

10.8 of research supervisors

22.3 of senior researchers

46.2 of researchers

66.5 of junior specialists

66.4 of assistant specialists

54.9 of technicians

55.5 of administrative workers

Source: National Statistical Office, Report on Workers of Scientific Organisation, 1996

Women in the law

Females constituted

50 percent (163) lawyers out of a total of 325 in 1997

Over half of Mongolia's judges.

18 percent of the Supreme Court

42 percent of the Provincial and Municipal Court

63 percent of sum district courts

As the Court's decision-making power rises, the representation of women falls.

Box 5 Women in the media

Females constituted

40 percent of journalists (out of a total of 1,500)

30 percent of all staff working on newspapers

40 percent of staff at the Mongol (national) Radio and Television organisation

Number of journals: 120

Number of registered newspapers: 576

Number of journals and registered newspapers with female editors or deputy-editors or senior executives: 28

Source: Women's Information and Research Centre, Gender Information, No. 2, 1997.

Conclusions

Economic transition has changed the nature of male and female participation in the Mongolian economy. Both groups have experienced greater job insecurity, reduction of state employment and the need for new skills and ways of generating income. Similar rates of unemployment exist for males and females, though slightly higher for females; this difference is, however, smaller than in other transitional economies (0.4 percent compared to the average of 6.0 percent). For both men and women, there have been declines in health and an increase in social problems.

Gender differences have emerged which mirror the experience of women in other transitional economies to some extent. Transition in Mongolia has eroded women's previous status, economic security, levels of reproductive health, and participation in public life. Women have less influence in policy-making bodies and forums than they had before transition. One impact of transition has been to increase their workloads, particularly for nomadic and rural women. Women have benefited less than men in the acquisition of assets from privatisation and this has affected their power to raise credit and loans for micro-economic enterprises and self-employment, resulting in fewer opportunities. Female-headed households are proportionately more likely than male-headed household to be in the poorest group in the population and are increasing (from 4.5 percent of the total in 1990 to 14.7 percent of the total in 1997).

The boundaries between male and female roles in family and work are shifting. 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 de-stabilised familiar male and female roles in this respect. For women, their roles as 'care givers' has expanded while their need to earn wages for the household economy has also increased. 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' (UNDP, 1997b, p. 26). Rebalancing male-female roles is currently in process however barriers to change are institutionalised in families and organisations, though not the law (the legal framework for equality largely exists).

The costs and opportunities of the transition process in Mongolia are being unevenly shared so far. It can be argued that some of the economic costs of transition are being absorbed through women's unpaid and increased work in the reproductive economy. However, the negative impact is not all in the direction of female disadvantage. Female participation in education, including higher education, is higher than that of males. Males are participating less in education

at a time when globally, education and training are seen as key ingredients for educational development and global competitiveness. Whatever the direction of gender differences, a more equitable balance is needed to make maximum use of human resources for economic and social development. From the perspective of the economic model given earlier, strategy for economic development in Mongolia has focused primarily on the productive economy in development objectives. Social development objectives and attention to the reproductive economy have followed on behind, often the result of non-governmental or donor-driven initiatives.

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