

Building an Engagement Strategy for the North American Mongolian Diaspora

Prepared For :

The International
Organization for
Migration (IOM)
Mongolia

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Photo-American Mongolian Association

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MEET THE TEAM

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BACKGROUND

Mongolia, a landlocked country, is situated between Russia in the north and China in the south. Following its independence from China in 1921, the Soviets established Mongolia as a socialist state. After the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, the country adopted a democratic, free-market economy in 1992. Mongolia has vast agricultural livestock and mineral resources, as well as an educated population. While the country's GDP has tripled since 1991 (World Bank 2019), there has also been a marked improvement in maternal and infant mortality indicators (World Bank 2019).

Over the last 30 years, since Mongolians gained the right to free movement and the mining sector contributed to an economic boom, there has been an increase in the flow of inbound and outbound migration. Young Mongolians look abroad for education in higher institutions as well as employment, especially in North America. Currently, out of a population of three million, an estimated 122,301 Mongolians are living abroad (Census 2020). This figure is said to underestimate the real diaspora numbers, which are reportedly in the range of 130,000-200,000 people (IOM 2021). Of these Mongolians, at least 34,480 people live in the North American countries of Canada and the U.S. (Statistics Canada 2016; Pew Research 2021).

Mongolian Diaspora in North America

While South Korea hosts the highest number of Mongolian migrants (39,982, or 32.69% of the diaspora), those in North America are likely to stay for longer periods of time. According to the Mongolian census (2020), there were 19,170 and 1,283 Mongolians in the U.S. and Canada respectively. However, a Pew fact-sheet (2021) reports at least 27,000 Mongolians in the U.S., half of whom have been living there for at least 10 years. The Canadian census (2016) states that 7,480 Mongolians live in the country.

In terms of the State-wise/Province-wide split of diaspora members in Canada and the U.S., there is some data available. The Pew fact-sheet suggests that the highest number of Mongolians in the U.S. live in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles (3,000 each); San Francisco and Washington (2,000 each); and Philadelphia, Seattle, New York, and Denver (1,000 each). In the case of Canada, to quote the 2016 census, the highest numbers are in Ontario (2,940); British Columbia (1,495); Alberta (1,565); and Quebec (960).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

National identity, cultural connection, and political and economic participation are all components of a citizen's experience that tie them to their homeland. Unfortunately, not all citizens' experiences are the same as some are diminished while others are bolstered. This is particularly true for Mongolian citizens in the Canadian and American diaspora as diaspora engagement continues to be an area that requires further development.

The purpose of this report is to present the compilation of an inclusive, but not exhaustive research on the best practices for engagement with Mongolia's diaspora in North America (Canada and the U.S). Substituting a problem statement for a project ambition, the report argues that the Mongolian government lacks a comprehensive strategy to incentivize engagement with Mongolians abroad. Considering this, we found that three key thematic areas of concern were pivotal to establishing steps in the right direction. They were: trust, engagement, and mobilization. When viewed separately, they offer very little but when combined, they operate to enhance one another and have the potential to foster meaningful change.

With these overarching themes in mind, we proceeded to look at specific areas of interest to us that were subsequently echoed by participants in our research. They were: knowledge transfer, the role of diaspora associations, language proficiency, and intergenerational engagement. The report also brings case studies that substantiate our findings and recommendations. Our research concluded that acting on these areas of study would benefit the Mongolian diaspora and the Mongolian economy with respect to the Vision 2050 plan.



Photo: IOM Mongolia



PROJECT AMBITION

Photo: IOM Mongolia

The Mongolian government lacks a comprehensive strategy, including a functional institutional mechanism, to incentivize systemic engagement of the Mongolians abroad, especially those in North America, in the development of their country of origin, adapted to the realities imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“The lack of trust occurred in the lack of continuity in state policies, especially the policies concerning diaspora needs. With each government switch, there is an overturn of government staff which ends the ongoing relationship that was in place. As a result, some good programs will be scrapped.”

- Interview respondent

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS

Based on our discussions with the IOM and a review of the literature, we identified three broad themes to understand the needs of the diaspora: trust, engagement, and mobilization. For the purpose of our research, IOM Mongolia and the Mongolian government are the decision-makers, and the diaspora associations and their members are the key stakeholders.

1. Trust

Rannveig Agunias and Newland (2012) identified trust as a key component for countries to develop a diaspora road map. Countries of origin need to build trust if they wish to attract and sustain diaspora interest. We identified the following trust-related questions:

- Why is there a lack of trust between the diaspora and the government and what has led to this outcome?
- What role does trust play in facilitating economic activities or knowledge transfer in Mongolia?

We understand that measuring trust requires the specification of parameters. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s trust framework, there are five dimensions to measuring trust: responsiveness, reliability, integrity, openness and fairness (OECD). We incorporated these parameters into our interviews and focus group discussions to get an approximate indication of how much the Mongolian diaspora trusts its home government.

2. Engagement

According to Aikins and White (2011), members of diaspora communities have different backgrounds, motivations, and connections to the home country, and they require individualized strategies of engagement. To assist the IOM in the development of an individualized diaspora engagement strategy, we identified the following question:

- What constitutes an enabling environment in the country of origin, particularly in terms of creating opportunities for knowledge transfer that address the priorities of the country?

3. Mobilization

According to Rannveig Agunias and Newland (2012), mobilization of the diaspora for development is another vital step in the development of an engagement strategy. This could be in the form of institutions or events dedicated to the diaspora. We developed the following question:

- What tools, services, and programs can IOM Mongolia and the government employ concerning diaspora, migration, and development that will enable efficient mobilization of resources and personnel within the country's North American diaspora?

These themes guided the formulation of our interview questions and focus group discussions and helped us narrow our focus while suggesting recommendations for IOM Mongolia.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

This section covers a qualitative analysis of our interviews and focus group discussions. We have divided this analysis into three sub-sections to enable a deeper understanding of the needs of the diaspora. Each sub-section corresponds to an issue that is important for the diaspora and helped frame our recommendations for IOM Mongolia.



Methodology

The study was carried out in the form of an explorative study using a mixed-methods approach. As a first step, the research was conducted in order to review the existing literature on the concept of diasporas and their engagement in the home country. In addition, existing statistical data and documents on the Mongolian diaspora in North America were analyzed.

We developed semi-structured interview questions to mirror those used in standard questionnaires in order to encourage greater consistency between responses across groups or individuals. However, the research team also sought to allow respondents to lead the direction of the discussion if they so wished. This was important to give respondents the space and time to talk about the issues that mattered to them. Interviews were carried out between October 2021 and December 2021. All interviews were conducted via Zoom.

In order to gain an overview of the existing organization of members of the Mongolian diaspora in North America, different channels were used. First, a search was conducted on Facebook, which had a list of Mongolian diaspora associations. Also, Facebook was chosen because it is widely known that it is a platform common as a communication tool by Mongolian diaspora associations. A common search of "Mongolian Diaspora association in Canada" yielded two results, and we figured out that this was not the best method. The Mongolian Consulate website in Canada proved to be helpful as it had a list of diaspora associations existing in Canada. For the search of diaspora associations in the U.S., a state-wise search was conducted on Facebook. This targeted approach yielded better results in producing information on active diaspora associations. This led us to the pages of 26 diaspora associations across the U.S. Subsequently, we invited these organizations to participate.

Of the 26 associations we contacted for the research, we heard back from only five – three of them were located in Canada and the other two in the U.S.

In order to compensate for the lack of response from diaspora associations, we identified five experts in the Mongolian diaspora community who were familiar with the dynamic nature of the relationship between the Mongolian government and the North American diaspora.

A question-and-answer session followed each meeting, and diaspora members were given the opportunity to ask questions or raise any points in relation to the findings presented. Diaspora members were actively engaged and interested in hearing the findings, and they raised a number of questions for the research team about our research, the Mongolian government and the IOM.





DIASPORA ASSOCIATIONS

Photo: American Mongolian Association

The Mongolian community in North America, while relatively small, has made big strides in contributing to Mongolia and its host countries in varied ways. The Mongolian culture itself promotes a tight organization and places ethical obligations on its people to provide mutual help, both at the household and at the country level. It is a diverse, heterogeneous community with a strong work ethic and commitment to self-help and self-advancement.

Most of our respondents were career professionals, with some students also represented, working across a range of roles in the private and public sectors. These groups maintain regularly updated and well-run social media groups and other communications channels. As with many transnational communities worldwide, use of social media and messaging apps is widespread, with numerous private groups on Facebook and Messenger. Many of the interviewed diaspora members referred to using such groups/networks in accessing and sharing information on Mongolia, and the Mongolian government already makes use of these to share information.

Structure

The linkages between the diaspora organizations represent a complex web of connections. Some organizations reported being somewhat well connected as they were cooperating with the Mongolian missions in their region, while other groups were not in contact with any of the Mongolian missions abroad. It was found that the level of communication and cooperation with the Mongolian embassies depended on proximity or for information about voting. It was reported by half of the diaspora association interviewed that leadership within the association was less structured and had no formal process. The structure of most associations mostly involved a secretary and the members. Only some associations had a board, which depended on the size, operations, and members of the association. Many diaspora associations mentioned the absence of a website. Facebook was used as a platform to connect with members, new Mongolian migrants and spread the word on important events or news.

Size

The size of a diaspora association did not correlate to the purpose of the organization or its founding date. Most organizations have around 30 members, yet much smaller and larger organizations do exist. The smallest associations reported having a maximum of seven members, while the larger associations reported memberships ranging from 120 to 200 members. According to recent research carried out by the Council of Mongolians living abroad, "17.3% of diaspora associations are concentrated in the USA. Approximately 4 out of 10 organizations consist of 1-10 people, 3 out of 10 organizations consist of 11-50 people, and the remaining organizations consist of above 51 people for their activities" (2021)

Membership

The memberships of diaspora associations have several characteristics in common. In terms of gender, most of these organizations have women members as the majority. Several associations reported having more members with families than single members. Membership in these associations requires no fee. Most associations cited the average age of their members to be around 30 to 40 years; however, some cited having young and middle-aged people. Education levels varied widely within the memberships of diaspora associations, with some members having university degrees or specialized skills and others lacking training.

Financial Situation

All organizations that participated in interviews reported working with very limited budgets. Most function predominately on membership dues/donations or program funding from the host country. For example, one group reported that if a member had a new baby or was hospitalized, donations would be collected from other members to help them. Overall, most associations cited financial concerns as the main obstacle to achieving both short- and long-term goals. Inter-association cooperation was only sporadic and happened with associations in the same State/Province around major events such as the Lunar New Year-Tsagaan Sar. With the onset of COVID-19, many diaspora associations have strictly relied on raising funds internally to function and support members going through extreme pandemic-related difficulties. Lastly, several organizations reported that cultural events and competitions were other avenues for raising funds.

All of the diaspora associations' founders were born in Mongolia and had migrated to North America, and many were in the country for over 10 years. In addition to the founders, the memberships of cultural organizations were primarily made up of first-generation migrants from Mongolia. Apart from minor children and teenagers, most diaspora associations reported having a low second-generation adult Mongolian who were born outside Mongolia in their membership. This could suggest an inability of these associations to stay alive after the initial migration stage. According to an interview respondent, "It is hard to get the youths interested in Mongolia because they were born here and say the language is too hard and find Western events more appealing." It therefore, remains to be seen whether the second generation will engage more in these kinds of associations as they grow and become older.

Projects and Activities

Diaspora associations most often identified their main purpose as being cultural preservation and expression in North America. In addition to this, many of these organizations ran small development projects in Mongolia, although this was not their main purpose as an association. Accordingly, many associations within this category were often active in North America and to a lesser extent, in Mongolia. The cultural activities of these organizations involved traditional dances, food, attire, and music from Mongolia.

The associations also organized cultural festivals or days to mark cultural celebrations held in Mongolia. These activities were done to maintain links with a culture that many respondents felt would be otherwise lost in North America. This was also done to engage the second generation to learn about their cultural heritage and to meet their other Mongolian peers. Some groups also stated their desire to introduce North Americans to their culture and create "bridges" between the two groups through such an exchange. Associations also reported meeting with other members solely to share food and dance together and teach their children about their ethnic heritage. Several associations reported organizing Mongolian language classes for their children who were born in North America and for any Canadian or American interested in learning.

Humanitarian aid and development work within Mongolia is also a secondary goal of many cultural organizations. This work is often minor in scale than the work done by development organizations and usually revolves around providing education, hospitals, orphanages, or other services that are often lacking in Mongolia.

Thoughts on Diaspora

During the research process, interview respondents were asked about what they thought of the government's efforts in reaching the diaspora in an effort to build an engagement strategy through Mongolian missions in their regions. All respondents emphatically stated that they were not aware of any actions from Mongolian missions and suggested a big gap in this area that could be improved. One diaspora association representative stated that partnering with the diaspora association on cultural events or on language programs offered by the association was a great way to fully engage and build a stronger link with the diaspora.

The respondents made considerably fewer references to diaspora members having economic ties to Mongolia. Some noted that they support their families back in Mongolia if they are in need as best they can through monetary remittances and that many of their friends or acquaintances do the same. There was, however, a common mention of raising funds to help support development opportunities back in Mongolia. An interviewee suggested that making this process easy and straightforward for diaspora members to contribute to initiatives back home is an area the Mongolian government can offer assistance.

Many of the diaspora associations interviewed expressed they had in the past or were currently involved in a form of knowledge transfer with Mongolia and saw this as an ongoing contribution to foster a closer link with Mongolia. The Council of Mongolians Abroad report stated that "diaspora associations (62%) informed that they would like to cooperate with IOM Mongolia" (2021). The members of diaspora associations and their supporters contribute a lot to the prosperity of Mongolia. As a result, a strengthened partnership between them and Mongolia is important. As a result, a strengthened partnership between them and Mongolia is important.

The multiple commitments by many diaspora members, especially with work and family, have been expressed as a reason that they are not as involved in events put on by the association and take on association duties. Some expressed an incentive to take on more responsibility will be based on the availability of a paid position or an honorarium, which will help compensate for lost time from work. With many of the associations having a small membership, the likelihood of paid positions becoming a reality is challenging.

Future Goals

Many of the organizations share similar goals for the future, and most of these goals revolve around both the cultural and development activities of the association. A common goal was to host more cultural events and gatherings where members could engage with one another and the ability to network with one another. There was also a desire to connect more with other diaspora associations across states.

Organizations often coupled a cultural goal with a goal for their development projects in Mongolia, most often taking the form of increasing and expanding the current level of aid. For example, one association wished to extend their aid to a Mongolian orphanage, from the current state of sending used books and clothing items on a smaller scale to shipping items in a shipping container needed to run the orphanage. Some associations also expressed a desire to go beyond humanitarian aid and develop avenues to transfer best practices and knowledge from North America to Mongolia, but none had mentioned that they had begun with this work.





KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Photo: IOM Mongolia

Under the area of 'knowledge transfer, we looked at the ways in which Mongolians in North America were contributing to Mongolia's development – thus helping to transfer their skills and expertise to improve Mongolia's human capital. Interview respondents were asked not only about current initiatives but also about how they could help in the future. A key takeaway from the interviews was that if individuals had the opportunity and the resources, they would participate in furthering Mongolian interests, at home and abroad.

Most of the Mongolians we interviewed had migrated to North America in search of a better future – through education and employment. They either lived with their family in North America or had plans to bring them closer to them once they were financially stable. Just like any other diaspora community, Mongolians who had the capacity to do so often sent their disposable incomes home, especially if they still had family in Mongolia. There were also multiple interviewees who relied on financial help from their families in Mongolia while they pursued higher studies in North America.

Apart from sending back financial resources, Mongolians were involved in a variety of activities – from organizing donation drives to facilitating exchange programs – that showcased their intent to remain connected to their homeland. Individuals studying/working in highly specialized fields like mining spoke about transferring their knowledge through more formal initiatives – through collaborations with the government or working with private consulting companies in Mongolia.

Our respondents were frequently involved with engaging in informal initiatives in Mongolia. One of them, for instance, was a professor in the U.S. who was interested in improving the quality of teachers in Mongolia. Through her own contacts in Mongolia, she had invited two Mongolian professors to her university, so they could have access to high-quality teaching methodologies, that could then be transferred to classrooms in Mongolia. The professor had sponsored the entire initiative, right from the visas to the travel and accommodation. When asked about it, she said "I'm not going to go back to Mongolia, but I'm going to do all I can from here to help the country."

In another instance, another respondent regularly hosted donation drives – where community members could drop in used books, clothes, soccer shoes, etc. and these were then shipped directly to Mongolia. Through her initiative, they built a small library in her town in Mongolia. Similarly, during the first wave of the pandemic, the wealthier members of the Mongolian diaspora had donated masks and other protective equipment to hospitals back home. Efforts like these had allowed small-scale contributions to come together to bring meaningful changes in Mongolia.

There were also significant challenges encountered by the diaspora when working/contributing to Mongolia. Often they reported problems of corruption, inefficiency, and lack of transparency that made it difficult to fully engage with the government. Respondents did mention that the pay differential and living standards in working in Mongolia vis-a-vis North America were also significant deterrents.

The Mongolian government, for instance, often relied on social messaging sites like Facebook or WhatsApp when exchanging official documents, which our respondents found to be strange but also dangerous. Ultimately, these experiences contributed to building a narrative that working with the Mongolian government was not considered ideal.

Apart from using their skills to benefit Mongolia, the Mongolian diaspora was also active in sharing knowledge within the community abroad. We learned of several initiatives that helped new diaspora members learn English or get a job, as well as programs that looked to provide material and emotional support to struggling community members. All diaspora associations, for instance, had been organized out of an organic need to establish a Mongolian community and stay in touch with people from home. These associations continue to be run on a volunteer basis, indicating their sincere efforts to build a community in addition to their daily responsibilities.

One of these initiatives was particularly noteworthy. Established diaspora members, usually academics, especially in the U.S. had organized annual seminars where Mongolians could discuss their research on Mongolia and share best practices with each other. Over the years, this initiative had gained popularity, and several diaspora members from all across North America participated in

these seminars. Their findings were compiled, and findings were often sent to the Mongolian embassy/government. Similar initiatives also existed in Europe and Australia.

What we have seen, throughout our research, is the ability of Mongolians to help their fellow diaspora members, and contribute to the development of Mongolia at home. However, all these efforts took place through individual initiatives, with the Mongolian government and embassy largely sidelined from the process. Our respondents often stated the lack of efficiency and transparency as key factors for bypassing the government, as well as a genuine absence of initiatives that could harness the potential of the diaspora for Mongolia's growth.





INTERGENERATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

Photo: American Mongolian Association

Rationale

In coordinating our themes, we identified intergenerational engagement as a key point for exploration due to some of our own experiences with diaspora settlement in varying countries. The rationale for its importance was in part due to the likelihood that a Mongolia diaspora will continue to exist as well as expand not just in the U.S and Canada but elsewhere as well. As generations of Mongolians continue to emigrate or be born out of the country, each generation will have varying diminishing ties to Mongolia. The assumption we took in essence was "as further generations continue to increase in the diaspora, future generations will experience a decrease in connection to Mongolia without efficient engagement programs".

Interviewee responses

Based on interview responses we identified that a number of participants who had children expressed their concern for their children's lack of interest in Mongolian culture and background. Similar sentiments and points of concern were expressed for those that did not have children but were keen on having some in the future. One respondent with children mentioned that they feel as if the "next generation doesn't want to go back, they just hate it." Not only do the children not want to go back, but some Mongolians in the older generations of the diaspora hesitate to return. This is because of greater economic opportunities and better gender and social justice indicators in the countries in which they reside. These responses told us that not only was this problem current but could be further exacerbated moving forward as a loss of culture becomes a natural consequence of long-term immigration.

Generational Initiatives

In identifying a need for intergenerational engagement, we searched for currently available programs initiated by the government addressing both present and future concerns. Our research found that some initiatives were started like a summer camp for Mongolian Children in Ulaanbaatar, the

Beehive program that encouraged Mongolians with professional expertise to return to Mongolia, and the Soyol (Soyol means culture in Mongolia) School in Germany which aims to teach youth in the diaspora the language and history of Mongolian culture to strengthen their Mongolian identity. “In the academic year of 2018-19, the school had four teachers and 29 students with Mongolian classes taking place on Saturdays twice a month” (European Union Global Diaspora Facility, 2021). However, most of these initiatives fell short of their target and were discontinued for various reasons, one in particular being the COVID-19 pandemic.

One respondent mentioned “at the moment, there are no comprehensive programs and the Beehive program that was short lived the government has been trying to engage the Mongolian diaspora abroad since the 1990s especially the first and second generation of the Diaspora”. Based on this response, it was either that Mongolia lacked general administrative and financial support for these programs or that these programs were not properly advertised. After a couple more interviews we came to the conclusion that the problem in this regard was an amalgamation of both cases.

In the U.S., specifically closer to the DMV area (Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia), there are initiatives like language schools and summer camps that seem to have found more success. One respondent stated that there are two Mongolian schools in Washington, DC, and that almost every city has a Mongolian weekend school where the language is taught. Furthermore, they were aware of active summer camps in four cities where families would pay \$500 for five days but stated that some families derive very little value from them.

On the topic of summer camps the respondent was asked about their awareness of the Taglit Birthright Program, and in reply, they stated that they had heard of it and it to be amazing adding that Mongolia had something similar when they were younger. “The same camp still operates. They send their kids to Mongolia and nobody speaks English anyway. There’s a giant campus, and you’re just surrounded in Mongolia. One parent usually volunteers to take all 25 kids.” Respondent feedback told us that summer camps do provide benefits in education, language, culture, and history and would be enhanced if held in Mongolia. Despite these benefits, they are not without their costs as programs charge exorbitant prices noted by one respondent. “Sending a kid is already expensive, and because you come from America they already charge a different price, sometimes four times extra.”

The impression we gathered from our interviews was that intergenerational engagement is an area of concern for diasporans as it not only affects the second, third and subsequent generations, but impacts the first generation as well. For the younger generations, the general sentiment was that they lacked connectivity to their homeland and felt little to no reason to engage with Mongolia any further than absolutely needed. Older generations in the diaspora, who were more concerned about bread-and-butter issues, also hesitated to engage further with their homeland. Despite there being initiatives targeted towards the younger generations, efficacy, feasibility and affordability presented dire issues as a majority of diasporans worked multiple jobs just to make ends meet. Diasporan voices must be heard and accounted for to assuage government skepticism and financial tensions experienced by the diaspora before intergenerational engagement can be further developed.



CASE STUDIES

ISRAEL

Israel's Taglit Birthright program is an engagement initiative that was launched in 1999 in Israel to address the dilemma that began to concern the Jewish world. Jewish people in the diaspora were getting further disconnected from their heritage, culture, and Community (A Free Israel Adventure, 2022). It currently operates as a 10-day journey for Jewish young adults between the ages of 18 and 26 years though in the past, the age ranges varied. Potential participants must have at least one Jewish birth parent or have converted to Judaism to be eligible. The Birthright program is currently the biggest global educational tourism organization and has provided young Jews in the diaspora with over 750,000 journeys to Israel (A Free Israel Adventure, 2022). Thanks to the bountiful support of its funding sources – like the State of Israel; the program's founders; philanthropists; the Jewish Federation system; and Keren Hayesod, the Jewish Agency for Israel; parents of trip participants; alumni of the program; and thousands of individuals donors – participants are offered a journey to Israel and its experience without an expectation of anything in return. As a result of its 20-year tenure, the Birthright program has contributed \$1.5 billion to the Israeli economy.

While increasing engagement, the program has also raised a few questions: Why are younger Jews (primarily American Jews) disengaging and more critical of Israel than their older counterparts? One explanation for this is the "distancing hypothesis," which states that the older you are, the more strongly attached to Israel you are likely to be (Waxman, 2017).



Photo-The Mongolian Family (Youtube)

Despite this, numerous survey data show that young American Jews are not any less attached to Israel than their older counterparts were at comparable ages. One reason we see more criticism coming from the newer generation is because they generally care about Israel and therefore want to challenge aspects about Israel that they deem to be controversial (Waxman, 2017). Today, one could go as far as to say that young American Jews believe that Israel deserves their criticism rather than their unquestionable support.

Throughout its two decades of operation, Israel's Taglit Birthright program has sparked the interest of researchers and made them conduct studies in a variety of areas. One study in particular began to look at the possible effects of intermarriage as a result of the program. Because the Birthright program operates through a lottery system when selecting its participants, it produces a quasi-experiment and a natural comparison group which allows for the resultant effects of the program to be studied more intently. As a result, researchers found that participants reported a stronger connection to Judaism and the Jewish people, while being more likely to marry someone Jewish and raise their children as Jewish compared to non-participants (Aronson, 2017). The program has showed strong correlations and decreases in the probability of intermarriage while increasing ones personal preference in marrying a Jew and having Jewish children (Saxe et al, 2011). Through embedding themselves in social networks through the program, Jewish engagement which included religious observance, philanthropic giving, and emotional attachment to Israel was increased. It comes as no surprise that having Jewish friends throughout childhood and adolescence was a strong indicator for Adult Jewish identity. One explanation for this was that the program increased homophily and ethnic capital, while producing a bandwagon effect on other unaffiliated Jews and integrating them into their social networks (Aronson, 2017). In some cases, a reverse socialization effect occurred as parents of Jewish children began to become envious of their children's opportunity for this experience as they had never been to Israel themselves. "I have never been to Israel, but both my kids and my husband have been. I was afraid to go due to safety concerns, but have decided that if they can do it, then I should be able to do it also." (Aronson, 2017).

The results of this program have proven to be beneficial as they show that it has impacted participants both in their short term and long term with not only Israel but Judaism as well (Aronson, 2017). The program's future potential demographic effects are substantial as it has the potential to alter and expand the Jewish demographic in not only the U.S but globally as well (Saxe et al, 2011).

MOLDOVA NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSOCIATIONS

In 2015, the UNDP in Moldova launched and implemented the Migration and Local Development Project, which was funded by the Government of Switzerland. The objective of this project was to support local governments in Moldova by building on the strengths of their migrant population.

To do so, UNDP Moldova had broad partnerships with national and local governments, the private sector, as well as civil society. Their focus on local development was built on five key pillars:

- 1. Mainstreaming emigration at the institutional level:** To build institutional capacity at the local government level, UNDP helped with the identification and designation of responsible focal persons for migration at the local level. After a preliminary needs assessment, there were also training programs that helped inform local officials of their updated job descriptions.
- 2. Mainstreaming emigration in local policymaking:** UNDP Moldova supported the launch of local emigration databases and helped local governments incorporate an emigration component into local strategies and policies.
- 3. Shaping diaspora involvement through the establishment of “hometown associations”:** Through large communication campaigns on social media, Moldovan emigrants and local communities were invited to establish Hometown Associations in their native localities with the purpose of improving service delivery and socio-economic development through concrete activities.
- 4. Supporting meaningful diaspora interventions through joint local projects:** UNDP devised and piloted a support and grant-matching scheme tailored to the needs observed and with the aim of implementing joint projects to support local services and economic development. This partnership involved a joint approach from the onset, engaging emigrants as co-authors of local initiatives (including through online consultations), co-funders, and, finally, co-implementers.
- 5. Scaling up and ensuring the sustainability of the model:** The model of emigrants’ engagement developed and piloted by UNDP in 38 localities through the MiDL project was scaled up to an additional 101 localities countrywide. Recognizing the practical applicability of the approach, and as a result of dedicated multi-year support through the project, the Moldovan government took the approach on board, scaled it, and financed it from national resources, despite competing priorities and a limited national budget. In 2020, the government of Moldova approved and rolled out the the first edition of the National Programme “Diaspora Succeeds at Home” (DAR51+3), hence adapting the model UNDP had devised and piloted (Engaging Diasporas in Local Development, 2020).

This case study was chosen because of its popularity, effectiveness, and its ability to generate opportunities for the diaspora within a short period of time. While it was initially launched as a pilot project with only 38 hometown associations, the republic of Moldova had more than 300 hometown associations by the end of 2020.

Over the five-year period, the diaspora has contributed approximately US \$2.6 million to the implementation of 82 community projects. These contributions were a combination of financial resources as well as a transfer of ideas, technology, and experiences gained abroad. More than 316,000 local Mongolians had benefited as a result of these services. (Engaging Diasporas in Local Development, 2020)

SOUTH KOREA'S DIASPORA ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

South Korea has been dealing with a declining birth rate since the 1990s. Around the same time, there has been an influx of migrants from Korea to other parts of the world. Migration like this in large numbers has had a significant impact on South Korea's "international and economic stature." (Song, 2014) To address the negative effects of these potential threats, the Korean government implemented an engagement strategy that would reach seven million Koreans living abroad, "transforming the diaspora into a positive force for long-term development" (Song, 2014). Providing "virtual extraterritorial citizenship" to Koreans abroad will not only build stronger ties but will foster "a Korean identity among the diaspora, enhancing and expanding economic and political cooperation with them, and building networks linking them to one another and to Koreans in South Korea." (Song, 2014).

With the establishment of the Overseas Koreans Foundation (OKF) in 1997, the government set out to achieve the following goals:

- The first is to foster a Korean identity among diaspora Koreans, especially among the younger generations, by providing them with educational support;
- The second is to enhance and expand economic and political cooperation between diaspora Koreans and their homeland;
- The third is to build and integrate networks among the diaspora Koreans in particular countries, the homeland, and other areas of the world" (Song, 2014).

The goals above have resulted in stronger networks that span across different generations of South Koreans abroad, thus strengthening their Korean identity. Also, this has given the government the opportunity to meet the needs and expectations of the diaspora in order for them to play an effective role in South Korea's economic and social development.

Apart from being in the same region as Mongolia, South Korea has successfully built an engagement strategy with its diaspora. Diaspora engagement at the national level has developed considerably in South Korea since 2000. The country's policy of engaging with its diaspora has focused largely on two areas: strengthening ethnic identity among the Korean diaspora and building networks among members of the diaspora and between the diaspora and Koreans in their ethnic homeland. As a result, the Mongolian government can learn how the South Korean government has provided an enabling environment for the realization of the goals of the policy mentioned earlier. This lesson will help the Mongolian government establish and implement the necessary legislative, policy and governance frameworks required for the successful implementation of the diaspora policy.

TEACHING MONGOLIAN AS A HERITAGE LANGUAGE: LEARNING FROM THE CASE OF TAMIL

Knowledge of an individual's mother tongue is an important marker of identity. The need to learn one's mother tongue becomes even more pronounced when an individual migrates to a country where the language is not widely spoken. This was brought out by our respondents when we conducted our fieldwork, which was aimed at identifying the issues faced by the Mongolian diaspora in Canada and the U.S. Some respondents expressed concern that though there were language-learning programs in different cities, they lacked the right methodology and rigor. We explain in this case study the learning tools adopted by Tamil speakers in Canada and the U.S., and their applicability to the Mongolian context.

Renganathan (2015) takes cues from Valdés (2001) to recommend the following steps that could be modified and applied to learning any heritage language.

1. Conduct a survey

Renganathan (2015) says that there needs to be a survey conducted among language speakers in a community where the questions asked include:

1. How many school and college- age students have functional proficiencies in the heritage language?
2. What kinds of language backgrounds do these students bring to the classroom? (Are they first, second, or third generation?)
3. Are these students willing to request instruction in the language, if not available, and to apply pressure on the academic institution to respond to their request?
4. Is the heritage language commonly taught as an academic subject in schools or colleges in the community? Should it be?
5. Is an out- of- school teaching context likely to be more effective?
6. Are teachers of the heritage language available?
7. Are pedagogical materials available?

2. Categorization and devising the syllabi

Renganathan (2015) categorises learners into four categories whose needs, he says, need to be accounted for through separate learning tools:

1. **Type I:** True heritage-language learners: They are fluent in both speech and comprehension: Vocabularies of high-register, such as newspapers may be introduced
2. **Type II:** Single-track heritage language learners: They are fluent in comprehension but not in speech: Rigorous training in speech to be introduced
3. **Type-III:** Passive heritage-language learners: They are relatively less-skilled in comprehension: More rigorous training in both speech and writing is necessary

4. **Type-IV:** Fall-back heritage-language learners: Not much exposure to the language as only one of the parents is Tamil: Instructions have to begin with quizzes and basic vocabulary practices. (Renganathan 2015).

3. **Creating differentiated learning environments**

a. **For Type-I and Type-II learners**

For Type-I and Type-II learners, who have regular exposure to the heritage language, there could be some emphasis on teaching them to speak as well as write the language. This can involve giving them a prescribed textbook, designed by a trained linguist. Here, multimedia content in the form of videos, audios, pictures, online exercises and glossaries can complement personalized instructions. Classroom time can be used for activities like narration of stories, producing new expressions by using words and phrases, and idiomatic constructions – all of which require interaction with an instructor. Also, acting out skits in classrooms – which helps students understand and use idioms and culture-specific vocabularies – can be made part of the classroom instruction (Renganathan 2008). The teachers are those certified by a reputed institution such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL).

b. **For Type-III and Type-IV learners**

These two categories of learners lack regular exposure to the language and hence the syllabus needs to be designed in a more simplified manner, where information is given using simple texts such as stories, easy conversations and riddles (Renganathan 2008). Speaking to us on this topic, linguist Vasu Renganathan – who teaches Tamil at the University of Pennsylvania and who has been teaching the language to students born in the U.S. since 1996 – says in an interview that a community language learning environment is suited for students who do not either speak or hear the heritage language at home or only one of whose parents speak or understand the language. He says that this can start with weekend classes where children are initiated into the language by parents using a simplified textbook, and in the presence of an instructor. The focus here has to be on making them speak and hear exclusively in the heritage language. This, along with exposure to interactive online tutorials, can continue for at least two semesters. Once the students gain enough interest, they can be given instructions at Type-1 and Type-2 levels.

4. **Visit to India to take part in language learning programs**

For Type I and Type II learners, the American Institute of India Studies offers different categories of language programs – summer programs that last for eight weeks; academic year programs that last for nine months; and one semester programs that last for around four months.

These steps, while not immediately applicable for Mongolian speakers due to paucity of budget and lack of numbers, can become applicable with an increase in diaspora numbers and an uptick in the strengths of associations.



CHALLENGES & LIMITATIONS

Photo: American Mongolian Association

This project sought to capture the views of a relatively small-sized sample of the Mongolian diaspora living abroad in North America. Although significant efforts were made to reach the widest audience possible, certain limitations affected the overall results of the exercise.

One of the main challenges encountered in conducting this study was recruiting respondents, which took significantly more time and resources than was anticipated. There was a marked reluctance from some community members to participate in the research.

Broadly speaking, the research team found it more fruitful to use informal approaches to reach groups of individuals rather than working formally with Mongolian diaspora community organizations in North America to organize interviews. This reflects the generally limited organizational capacity of North American Mongolian diaspora organizations, many (if not most) of which are not formally registered and are run by community members on a voluntary basis.

The Mongolian government itself actively recognizes and promotes the role of Mongolians abroad in contributing to Mongolia's development and growing prosperity. This is evidenced through numerous Mongolian government policy and planning documents and speeches and other announcements.

RECOMMENDATIONS



POLICY FRAMEWORK

The diaspora policy guide provides a framework that facilitates coordination and policy coherence with other stakeholders (between departments, ministries, local, regional and central stakeholders, and partners).

The policy guide document should:

- be concise and illustrate the roles that diaspora associations and Mongolian missions will play;
- make use of evidence-based information
- state the outcomes of the partnership and how it ties into the government's Vision 2050;
- be defined for a long period of time in order to offer a long-term perspective, between 3-5 years

A sound policy framework provides legitimacy, thereby making it more resilient to changes in political leadership. Buy-in from a number of key high-level actors, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Mongolian missions abroad, diaspora associations, among others, is essential to ensure the sustainability of initiatives. Before starting the process of developing a strategy, a coordination mechanism at the national level and a national focal point should be established. The output section of the result matrix explains this coordination mechanism.

The purpose of a diaspora policy guide is to develop relationships with the diaspora and conceptualize the engagement at all government levels and with various stakeholders, including civil society, the private sector, and diaspora associations. It mobilizes the key stakeholders around a common goal and clearly defined operational objectives and can help attain political and administrative support for its implementation. This is a policy document that helps Mongolian missions plan strategically and, from the beginning, establish a workable plan with short-, medium-, and long-term goals to engage the Mongolian diaspora in the development of Mongolia and to the sustenance of the Mongolian language and culture. The policy guide will contribute to building, strengthening, and institutionalizing the relationships between Mongolia and its migrants overseas productively and sustainably.

The diaspora Policy guide will seek to consolidate and increase philanthropic contributions of the diaspora in education programs, language and knowledge transfer. Strengthening partnerships with the diaspora will serve to cement benefits toward nation-building and the engagement of the diaspora in areas of national priority while facilitating mechanisms for advocacy and policy coherence on issues relevant to Mongolia's development. This was echoed in a recent report by the Council of Mongolians living abroad; there was a need to "implement a more progressive policy for Mongolian diaspora, their families and children; to expand cooperation, information exchange and mutual understanding between the Government of Mongolia and NGOs (diaspora associations)

established by Mongolians" (Council of Mongolians, 2021, p.6) As key stakeholders and beneficiaries, the diaspora will play an integral role in developing and implementing the diaspora policy guide. The extent of their involvement will be manifested in their role as investors, partners, networkers and key collaborators in partnership with the Mongolian government, private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society. The diaspora will also be key informants as well as a source of assistance for monitoring and implementation of policy actions and outcomes.

The successful implementation of a diaspora policy guide requires a government agency dedicated to diaspora issues and tasked with facilitating inter-ministerial communication, coordination, and coherence. We see this happening through the training of officials working at Mongolian missions abroad to lead and sustain coordination in ensuring the successful implementation of the project.

Also, the Mongolian government has to be committed to providing the enabling environment for the realization of the vision, goal, outcomes and actions of the policy as well as establish and implement the necessary legislative, policy and governance frameworks required for the successful implementation.



KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

As discussed above, our interviews discussed the inclination of Mongolians abroad to contribute to Mongolia's growth, but highlighted the challenges that they faced during this process. Currently, diaspora involvement in Mongolia is of a social and charitable nature and lacks effective institutional backing. This is both inefficient and ineffective, as these contributions are conducted through informal channels, unable to lead to widespread change in Mongolia. Moldova, for its part, has succeeded in leveraging the strengths of its diaspora for local development, as discussed in an earlier section. It is important to note that Moldova has a huge diaspora that contributes significantly to its country. However, prior to its current diaspora program, it too lacked the institutional mechanism to increase and consolidate diaspora contributions. Currently, Moldova has succeeded in integrating the diaspora into its development model.

If a similar model is implemented in Mongolia, it will involve setting up local associations in cities, and building their capacity such that they can bring together the diaspora and the locals. This program would for the diaspora to directly contribute to local development – through a transfer of ideas, technology, technical expertise, and financial resources. Projects would be finalized keeping in mind the priorities of local communities and diaspora members – after extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders. This model will not only build accountability and transparency throughout the development process but also ensure that the diaspora meaningfully contributes to Mongolia's growth.

INTERGENERATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

A Mongolian “Heritage” Program, modeled after the Taglit Birthright Program, aims to engage young Mongolians in the diaspora for generations to come. The Mongolian diaspora is rather young and although current engagement practices with the government and the diaspora are being developed, there is little focus on subsequent generations and their connection to Mongolia. The heritage program proposes to send children in the diaspora back to Mongolia for a summer camp to be held for 14 days. The camp will include a variety of classes ranging from history to music, workshops, events, and tours to allow young Mongolians to be immersed and connected with Mongolian culture. With this initiative, we hope to see an increase in connection and interest to Mongolian land and cultural heritage for future generations. The first year of this program will target 100 participants aged 5-18 with a 50/50 split in gender with the possibility of increasing participation in later years if successful. Participants are to be picked through a lottery system initiated by a neutral third party to emulate fairness and reduce the risk of corruption throughout the selection process.

This program is a bold initiative that requires a substantial amount of funding much like its predecessor. From 2015-2019 the Taglit birthright program had an average of \$135,877,000 for its budget.





A majority of its budget, around 53%, was provided by philanthropists whilst 32% and 15% were funded by the government of Israel and communities and federations respectively in 2019. Expenditures were broken down into “Educational Trips & Activities”, “Research & Evaluation”, “Marketing, PR & Fundraising”, and lastly “Administration & Other”. With roughly 89% of going into "Educational Trips & Activities." Despite the expensive upkeep of the program, it is not without its merits. Over the 20 years of its tenure, the Birthright program has brought over \$1.5 billion dollars back to the Israeli economy, proving it to be an initiative with economic merit.

From what we can see this program is not cheap by any means and although the Mongolian Heritage program would be operating on a much smaller scale, funding is crucial for it to come into fruition. Considering this, awareness and funding campaigns involving corporations, NGOs and communities are necessary and need to be conducted year-round to generate financial support to meet program needs and expand on goals in alignment with Mongolia's Vision 2050 Development plan.

LANGUAGE PROGRAM

After accounting for the fact that many of our respondents felt that their Mongolian identity was tied to knowledge of Mongolian and also that some of them felt that their next generation was growing up without any exposure to the language, we would like to propose the development of a language program in some form. To begin with, we need to assess knowledge of the Mongolian language among some of our respondents, for which we propose to conduct focus groups and quasi-interviews. This will involve a total of 100 Canada-born Mongolian-origin teenagers in the 5-17 years age group who will be administered a test in the Mongolian language, developed with the help of a linguist. Here, we are assuming that their knowledge of Mongolian is limited. We would then design a curriculum for a six-month course in coordination with an organization that specializes in research on the Mongolian language. Following this, we would assess the knowledge of the students on the same test. The target here is to make at least two-thirds of the respondents score over 70% in the language test. If this ex-post facto evaluation is successful, the program can be scaled up to include all Mongolians in Canada and the U.S. in the 5-17 years age group. It also needs to be mentioned here that the curriculum will be differentiated, based on whether one or both their parents speak the language. If both parents speak the language, they can be categorized as either belonging to the first or the second category (in line with what the case study on Tamil language learning says) and given advanced instructions. If only one parent speaks the language, this would mean that the children lack the basic exposure to the language at home and more immersion is necessary that would start with the alphabet and the basic vocabulary.





CONCLUSION

Photo-American Mongolian Association

This policy project marked the first attempt at understanding the Mongolian diaspora in general and the country's expatriate community in North America in particular. Based on our literature review and fieldwork, four areas of possible action – knowledge transfer, diaspora associations, intergenerational engagement and language training – were identified. Case studies on diaspora engagement programs among South Korean, Israeli, Moldovan, Sri Lankan and Indian communities were used as templates to make recommendations. We have to qualify our report by reiterating that we were operating under great time, financial and personnel constraints due to which our findings are not generalizable to the entire Mongolian North American diasporan population. Neither are our recommendations necessarily applicable across the Mongolian diaspora spectrum – the needs of the Mongolian community in South Korea, for instance, could be substantially different. That said, considering that Mongolia is a young country with a median age of around 28.2 years (Worldometer 2022) and its expatriate population across regions is only likely to increase in the near future due to many push and pull factors, there is enormous scope for further work on this topic. Further, our study could act as a useful starting point for researching other small diasporan populations.

“The formation of a diaspora could be articulated as the quintessential journey into becoming; a process marked by incessant regroupings, recreations, and reiteration...”

— Okwui Enwezor
Nigerian artist, poet and writer

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