Save the Children in Mongolia

Project Spotlight: Improving Primary Education Outcomes for the Most Vulnerable Children in Rural Mongolia

Project Fast Facts

**Project name:** Improving Primary Education Outcomes for the Most Vulnerable Children in Rural Mongolia

**Location:** 30 soums (similar to villages) in Arkhangai, Dornod, Sukhbaatar and Uvurkhangai provinces

**Donor:** World Bank's Japan Social Development Fund (JSDF)

**Project Timeframe:** June 2012 – June 2016

**Reach:** 7,500 children ages 5-10

Project Focus:

To improve the education outcomes of 7,500 vulnerable children (aged 5 to 10) in herder families across four educationally underperforming and underserved rural provinces of Mongolia. The project is designed to comprehensively address the unmet needs and gaps in the lower-primary education delivery for the most disadvantaged nomadic children in remote rural communities of Mongolia, who face very specific challenges in adapting to school and school dormitory life in early childhood stages.

The Situation in Mongolia:

Mongolia is a newly developing country – both vast and beautiful, with low population density – which is striving to strengthen human rights and democratic governance, while harmonizing both nomadic and urban civilization. Save the Children has been working in Mongolia since 1994 to support Mongolian children’s development and wellbeing, with particular focus on the country's most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

In Mongolia, many nomadic herder families face with great challenges to send their children to kindergarten and support their development due to nomadic way of living. Furthermore, there are very few handbooks, guidelines and learning materials - especially educational toys and books – available locally for herd to prepare their children for school.

In many cases, herder families send their children to school without early childhood education (ECE) and children face with many challenges including emotional distress, falling behind in learning and dropping out of school.

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Project Innovations and Results:

- **Tools to help parents prepare children for school at home.** One challenge facing many parents is finding effective methods to support their children's learning. To address this, the project developed several handbooks – "You Are a Teacher" for parents, and "I Can Do It" for children – along with digital tools and an audio version of "You Are a Teacher," for parents with low-literacy levels. The handbook contains step by step guidance, exercises, as well as fairytales, songs, poems that parents can teach to their children through short, 20-30 minute daily sessions. To date, 2,500 herder families and their children have benefitted from this program.

- **Making books and education games available through "My book Palace."** Since most herder families live in remote areas, without many children's books or other educational materials, the program developed a series of 10 mobile learning kits - boxes that contain 3 educational toys and 10 different story books. Each family picks up a kit from their local soum (village) library, takes it home for 10-14 days, and then returns it in exchange for another kit. After children have completing all 10 kits, they will have engaged with 30 educational toys and 100 books. This component was received with high excitement by rural nomads and their children and has significantly helped herder families to prepare their children for school while doing their everyday chores. Furthermore, mobile library kits are not only being used by herder families and their children but also by kindergarten and primary school children. To date, 70-90 children are using the packages on monthly basis and over 2,200 children have completed all 10 packages.

The program has seen many positive changes in children who have participated in the home-based school preparedness program, including:

- Learned the ability to communicate and talk with other people. And gained the ability to share their knowledge and findings with their friends and neighbors.
- Learned to identify different colors and shapes, and learned the ability to compare items and sequence the items.
- Learned to tell stories by looking at the pictures, and became eager to share and show their newly learned songs and poems with others.
- Learned to draw and imitate pictures, and developed the ability to distinguish and name the items.
- Learned to use scissors to make different types of shapes.
- Learned the names and order of 12 year animals.

And further, parents demonstrated an increase in positive behaviors towards their children through participation in the program:

- Understood the importance of shared time with their children and started to spend quality time with their children.
- Understood the importance of cooperation with others for developing their children.
- Understood not to scold their children by comparing them with other children. Became patient and put more effort into listening to their children.
- Learned a lot of new songs and poems, and learned new things from the books that they read to their children.
- Learned the age and developmental differences of children.
- Learned more about the school environment.