Escaping the Rhetoric
A Mongolian Perspective on Participation in Rural Development Projects

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By J.W. Berends

This thesis explores how stakeholders in Mongolian rural development projects interpret the concept of ‘participation’. While previous research has provided an ethnographic snapshot of participation in rural development projects, none has yet focused on Mongolia – a post-socialist nation that receives significant amounts of foreign aid. To gain a holistic picture of ‘participation’, this study explores: how stakeholders understand participation; what stakeholders perceive and prioritise as the benefits of participation; and which factors motivate or inhibit participation.

This study’s methodology involved an inductive, qualitative approach with a multiple case study design. Three Mongolia rural development projects, each with objectives of poverty-reduction and participation, were selected from three different development organisations and interviews were conducted with different stakeholder groups: development organisation managers, field staff, and local people of the project sites (participants and non-participants).

The results of this study revealed a dominant or ‘Mongolian’ understanding of ‘participation’ existed across the various stakeholders: ‘Participation is local contributions of group labour and information for material benefits, within a top-down authoritarian structure (including local institutions)’. This understanding arose from development organisations’ emphasis on efficiency and sustainable results and local people engaging with the project as a normative livelihood strategy.

In this study, given the incidence and nature of rural poverty, stakeholders prioritised the tangible benefits of participation over the intangible and linked empowerment to tangible outcomes. Development staff prioritised the longer-term tangible benefits (food security and income), and to ensure their sustainability sub-benefits were provided sequentially, mental capital, then physical capital, with social capital built naturally through the project’s formal
and informal activities. In contrast, local people prioritised the manifest tangible benefits, which initially meant the physical capital gifted by the project, and then later the material outcomes of the new livelihoods. While development staff envisioned intangible benefits as important in their own right, for Mongolian participants they were a gateway to the project’s tangible outputs. Four prominent intangible benefits emerged: knowledge/mental investment, ‘power within’, social connections, and involvement in groups – each uniquely valuable within the Mongolian context.

The results also showed that the factors which shaped participation reflected the unique circumstances of rural Mongolia and each project’s activities. Economic rationality appeared as the foundational incentive for participation, followed by social motivations that included: widespread, detailed, and positive information about the project; the perceived power, leadership, and organisational skills of the development organisation; a deep personal relationship between development staff and local people; and rurally-oriented seminars and workshops. The major barriers to ‘Mongolian’ participation included: a lack of opportunity or incentive to participate; the current situation of poverty and unemployment; Mongolia’s governance structures, culture, and history; the geography of isolation; the development organisation’s procedures; and the dynamics of project ‘groups’. Moreover, the results indicated that projects which require higher levels of local participation, i.e. decision-making, may face more fundamental obstacles because of the cultural value placed upon top-down, authoritarian leadership and a prevailing mentality of dependence.

Based on these results, this study concludes that interpretations of participation arise out of field-level realities, and thus the level of participation incorporated into development projects needs to reflect the local culture, context, and history.

**Keywords:** barriers, benefits, culture, development, empowerment, grass roots, participation, Mongolia, motivation, rural development, projects, social capital.
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Glossary

Aimag – province, or provincial capital
Ail – group of friends and relatives living together
Altan – ‘golden’, fictitious name given to mining site in Project C
Ajul – work
Bag – rural sub-districts within a sum
Be Beinday – one another
Belen Setgelay – dependent spirit, or dependency
Brigade – working group
Bulag – group
Chadvarjoohlaj – to gain in confidence, capacity or become more capable
Darag – boss, leader
Ger – yurt, the Mongolian traditional, circular, portable tent-like dwelling constructed from wood and felt
Hamrakh – to involve, include, affect, embrace
Hamtdaa Ajulaar – working together
Idekhtie – active or lively
Khordorlmor – labour
Khorshee – cooperative, also the name for the successors of the negdels in the 1990s
Khot Ail – a herder group consisting of friends and relatives
Khural – elected assembly of governance
Kompan – company, also the name for the successors of the negdels in the 1990s
Nadaam – Mongolia’s largest sporting festival, held annually in July
Nam – political party, name given to the ‘state’ during the Communist period
Negdel – livestock collective during the Communist period
Nen Yadoo – poorest of the poor
Ninja – a Mongolian miner involved in small-scale artisanal mining
Ohrulzokh – to participate, attend, take part in, to be included
Sain – good
Sum – rural districts within an Aimag
Suur – smallest working unit within the negdel system
Tandag Huuus – literally ‘known people’, this term designates people whom one knows, have relationships with, and who are, therefore, members of one’s ‘in-group’

Tugrick – Mongolian currency

Ulaanbaatar – capital city of Mongolia

Zuud – a harsh winter, accompanied by large-scale livestock losses
## Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<tr>
<td>AS</td>
<td>Aimag Staff</td>
</tr>
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<td>ASM</td>
<td>Artisanal Small-scale Mining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CI</td>
<td>Cultural Informant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOM</td>
<td>Development Organisation Manager</td>
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<tr>
<td>GDP</td>
<td>Gross Domestic Product</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDI</td>
<td>Human Development Index</td>
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<tr>
<td>HL</td>
<td>Higher-Level</td>
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<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<tr>
<td>LF</td>
<td>Local Facilitator</td>
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<td>LFB</td>
<td>Local Field Boss</td>
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<td>LPM</td>
<td>Local Participant Miner</td>
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<tr>
<td>MCI</td>
<td>Mongolian Cultural Informant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MES</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPR</td>
<td>Mongolian People’s Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPRP</td>
<td>Mongolia People’s Revolutionary Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
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<td>NP</td>
<td>Non-Participant</td>
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<td>NPD</td>
<td>National Project Director</td>
</tr>
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<td>NPF</td>
<td>Non-Participant Family</td>
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<td>NPM</td>
<td>Non-Participant Miner</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P</td>
<td>(Local) Participant</td>
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<td>PLA</td>
<td>Participatory Learning and Action</td>
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<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Project Manager</td>
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<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rural Appraisal</td>
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<td>SGV</td>
<td>Sum Government Vice-President</td>
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<td>Sum Project Counterpart</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>UNRISD</td>
<td>United Nations Research Institute in Social Development</td>
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<td>USSR</td>
<td>Union of Soviet Socialist Republics</td>
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Background: ‘Ямар хүн бэ?’

Before delving into this thesis I feel it is important that the reader understands where the research has emerged from and who stands behind ‘all those words’ on the following pages. In other words a common introductory Mongolian question needs to be answered: ‘Ямар хүн бэ?’ or literally ‘What person is this?’

I am a New Zealander, born to parents of Dutch descent, and raised in Auckland. After completing tertiary studies in Health Science, I felt led to move to Mongolia in 2002. My experiences within Mongolia inspired me to undertake my current studies in International Rural Development.

I have a deep love and concern for Mongolia, which arose and was nurtured during time spent living in rural Mongolia between 2002 and 2006. My work in Mongolia included teaching a community English class and working alongside the local Christian church. Over this time I grew to appreciate Mongolian culture, history and language, and admire the hospitality, resilience, and independence of Mongolia’s rural people. Meanwhile, the direness of Mongolia’s situation was also apparent to me as poverty, corruption, alcoholism, and environmental degradation were everyday realities.

While living in Mongolia my attention was turned towards the numerous development projects which were operating within the rural communities I lived in or visited. In fact, a number of my Mongolian and expatriate friends were involved in such projects, as beneficiaries, workers, or managers. Whilst these projects offered hope and a way forward out of poverty, there were also criticisms that some projects ‘ажилгүй’, or ‘didn’t work’ because they failed to adequately take into account Mongolia’s culture and context. Hence, my thesis topic is a reflection of this reality: the hope and opportunity of development projects, but also the issues inherent to designing and implementing projects within a Mongolian context.

After an interim of two years away from Mongolia the field research was carried out in May/June 2008 and it left me in no doubt that Mongolia was continuing to change rapidly. It was immediately evident in the number of new four-wheel drive vehicles, the increased availability of western products, and the high-rise building projects that wealth had, for some
Mongolians, increased. Nonetheless, my first-ever sightings of beggars in rural centres was
evidence that the gap between rich and poor was increasing. Meanwhile, poor spring rains, a
doubling in the price of basic food stuffs in the last months, recent reports of high-level
government corruption, and approaching elections, meant that the research was carried out
amidst an air of tension. The two months of research in Mongolia left a feeling that, while
Mongolia was developing, those in poverty were struggling to keep up.

1.2 Introduction to the Research

Mongolia has been subjected to a series of major socio-cultural, political, and economic
changes throughout its history. Mongolia was born as a nation under Chinggis (‘Genghis’)
Khan’s totalitarian leadership in the early 13th century and became the largest land empire the
world has ever seen. Following infighting amongst Chinggis’s descendants this empire
splintered and Mongolia was subjugated to centuries of foreign rule by successive Chinese
dynasties. During this time Mongolian society became increasingly feudalistic, divided into a
ruling class made up of Manchu administrators and merchants, Mongolian nobility, Buddhist
monks, serfs, and common people. After declaring its independence from China in 1911,
Mongolia formed an independent government supported by Russia; leading to the
establishment in 1924 of the Mongolian People’s Republic (MPR), founded on communist
principles.

For almost the next seventy years the MPR was to become a satellite state of the Soviet Union
with its history, economic, and social policies closely resembling those of its patron. Rapid
and large-scale changes within Mongolia took place as, with the Soviet Union’s assistance,
Mongolia was transformed from a feudal society to an urbanised, collectivised, industrialised,
and centrally-planned developing nation. However, these changes occurred amidst a
discouragement of Mongolia traditional culture, a series of religious and political purges,
increasing losses of basic human rights and freedoms, and an authoritarian leadership
structure. With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the eventual demise of communist power,
Mongolia underwent a peaceful democratic revolution in 1991. Since then, supported by
international donors and lending institutions, the Mongolian government has pursued
aggressive economic reforms, called ‘shock therapy,’ to move towards a free-market
economy.

This last century of tumultuous transitions has left Mongolia independent and democratic, but
experiencing widespread poverty and increasing inequalities. By the end of the Communist
era, Mongolia, with large subsidies from the Soviet Union, had low levels of unemployment, an expansive social welfare system (including universal health and education services), a burgeoning export sector, and extreme poverty was almost non-existent (Sanders, 1987; Rossabi, 1995). The ‘shock therapy’ policies of the 1990s, combined with a series of harsh winters and the withdrawal of Soviet assistance saw Mongolia’s Human Development Index (HDI) worsen through the 1990s. This led Sneath to comment in 2002, “The real transition that Mongolia has experienced has been from a middle-income to a poor country, as if the process of development has been put into reverse” (p. 196). In recent times, partially due to Mongolia’s abundant mineral wealth, its national economic and development national statistics are improving; for example, from 2003 to 2007 the economic growth rate averaged 8.7, and the HDI rose from 0.661 in 1999 to 0.700 in 2007 (114th of 177 countries) (UNDP, 2007). However, these gains have not trickled down to the masses, with Mongolia’s inequality statistics subsequently rising and 37 percent of the rural populace reported as living below the poverty line (UNDP, 2007).

As a result of its poverty, and because of its continued adherence to democratic and free-market reforms, Mongolia has received substantial amounts of development assistance (ranging from 15 to 30 percent of GDP). Initially a large portion of this assistance was used on large-scale infrastructure and free-market capacity building projects. Recently, however, donors have started allocating their resources to poverty alleviation strategies. Hence a substantial portion of aid is delivered to Mongolia through rural development projects. A number of authors, including Sneath (2002), and Rossabi (2005), have taken a critical view of such development assistance contending that it failed to benefit the poor as it did not take into account Mongolia’s “nomadic socialist economy, which operated in a cultural/philosophical world at odds with some of the basic assumptions of a free-market economy” (Campi, 1996, p. 92).

The participation of local people within rural development projects is one of the central pillars of the people-centred development paradigm that emerged in the 1980s. Local participation is credited as improving a project’s efficiency and sustainability by incorporating local knowledge, ideas, and resources, as well as bringing about the ‘empowerment’ of local people. However, the term ‘participation’ has been criticised as being an ambiguous concept; having taken on chameleon properties, it can be interpreted in different ways, by different stakeholders, for different purposes.
A number of authors have categorised participation in development projects into typologies with lower and higher levels (Arnstein, 1969; Pretty 1995; Chambers, 2005). In lower levels of participation, local people contribute labour, time, and resources, and decisions are controlled by the development organisation. In contrast, in higher levels of participation local people take command of the project, undertake their own analysis, and make key decisions. It is has been suggested by authors, such as Chambers (1995, 1997, 2005), that higher levels of participation will bring about the genuine empowerment of local people; however others have reported that participating in lower levels may also be an empowering process (Nelson & Wright, 1995).

Even though the world is now referred to as a ‘global village’, the groups of people within it still remain unique. Hence, as case studies have shown, within rural development projects heterogeneous stakeholders interpret ‘participation’ in divergent terms, and assimilate participation into existing frameworks (Oakley, 1991; Marsland, 2006). The way Mongolians interpret participation will be shaped by factors such as their culture, local context, social/economic/political situation, past experiences, etc. Thus, this research will explore how stakeholders in Mongolian rural development projects interpret the concept of ‘participation’. The research will seek to examine not only how participation is understood, but also those factors which influence local people’s participation in projects, i.e. what motivates people to participate and what inhibits them from doing so.

Participating in a development project can have both tangible and intangible benefits for local people. Higher levels of participation within a project have been linked to an increase in intangible benefits such as empowerment, social capital, and self-confidence. Heterogeneous stakeholders are likely to bring different expectations and priorities of benefits, which will ultimately affect the manner in which they engage in projects. Therefore, this research will also seek to understand what the stakeholders of Mongolian rural development projects perceive as the benefits of participation and which benefits they prioritise.

The authors Nelson and Wright call for a “critical analysis of ethnographic contexts to see how the discourse and procedures of participation actually work in practice” (1995, p. 2). It is beyond the scope of this research to provide a detailed longitudinal study into participation within development initiatives in Mongolia. Rather, to answer this call, an ethnographic snapshot, through case studies of three development projects will be used to highlight emerging themes. The research is not attempting to make an authoritative statement regarding
the ‘best practice’ for participation in Mongolian development initiatives. Instead, it is hoped that the knowledge gained from this research will assist development workers to gain a deeper understanding of Mongolian conceptualisations of participation in rural development projects. This knowledge could be used to incorporate Mongolian views of participation and its benefits, motivations, and barriers into project directives, thus enabling development projects to function within, rather than outside, the local culture and context.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The research’s aim is to explore how stakeholders in Mongolian rural development projects interpret the concept of ‘participation’. In line with this aim, the linkages between participation and benefits, and the factors which influence local people’s participation will also be examined.

The research aim will be explored through the following key questions and sub-questions:

- How do stakeholders in Mongolian rural development projects understand the concept of ‘participation’?
  - How does a participatory project manifest itself practically?
  - How do stakeholders theorise ‘participation’?
  - What language is being used to communicate a participatory approach?

- What do stakeholders in Mongolian rural development projects perceive as the benefits of participation?
  - What do stakeholders perceive as the tangible and intangible benefits of participation?
  - Which benefits do stakeholders prioritise?

- Which factors influence participation within Mongolian rural development projects?
  - What motivates Mongolians to participate?
  - What are the barriers to participation?

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter Two provides the background for this thesis through a review of the concept of ‘participation’ in the development literature and an overview of Mongolia. Section 2.2 begins
with a brief history of participatory development and is followed by a description of the different conceptualisations of participation within contemporary development theory and practice. This section also examines the relationship of participation to ‘empowerment’, participation’s benefits and motivating factors, and attempts to clarify the concept of participation. Section 2.3 describes the quandaries and barriers to participation in development initiatives, both theoretically and practically. This ends with a review of four case studies that highlight how interpretations of participation in rural development projects depend upon the unique circumstances of the stakeholders and the project’s activities. Section 2.4 provides the context for this thesis, through an overview of Mongolian history, contemporary society, and relevant cultural characteristics. Relevant case studies are also described to show how participation is manifested within contemporary Mongolian rural development projects.

Chapter Three describes the methodology employed to fulfil the research’s aims and objectives in light of its context, Mongolia. This includes an overview of, and the rationale for, the research’s inductive, qualitative, multiple-case-study approach, followed by a description of the practical methods used during the research process. Then the research’s ethical issues, cross-cultural considerations, and limitations and constraints are considered and explained.

Chapter Four presents the results of the research and relates them to the study’s aim of exploring stakeholder interpretations of the concept of ‘participation’ in rural Mongolian development projects. This chapter begins with the results from the interviews with informants on Mongolian culture, and describes how these Mongolians and expatriates understand certain aspects of contemporary Mongolian society and culture. In Sections 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5, the results from each of the three case studies are presented separately. Within each section the results are explained in relation to the research’s key questions and are supported by quotations from the interviews.

Chapter Five contains the study’s discussion section, where the results of the three case studies presented in Chapter Four are correlated and compared and analysed in relation to ‘participatory’ development literature and Mongolia’s unique circumstances. This chapter contains three sections which correspond to the key questions used to explore how the concept of participation is interpreted in Mongolian rural development projects. Section 5.2 discusses the various understandings of participation, Section 5.3 the benefits of participation,
and Section 5.4 the factors which influence participation. Lastly, Section 5.5 highlights the constraints of this study and makes suggestions for future research.

The thesis concludes in Chapter Six, with a summary of the main findings for the study’s key questions, thus fulfilling the research’s overarching aim. The chapter then suggests implications for development projects in Mongolia and development more generally.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction
This chapter reviews the literature regarding the concept of ‘participation’ in development and overviews the nation of Mongolia. This chapter thus provides the background to the research’s aims and objectives enabling its findings to be discussed in relation to the existing body of knowledge. The first section of the literature review describes the concept of ‘participation’ in development and begins with a historical overview. The recent conceptualisations of participation are then examined, followed by a description of participation’s link to ‘empowerment’ and participation’s benefits, motivating factors, and clarifying questions. Section 2.3 reveals the quandaries associated with participatory theory and practice, specifically the myth of a homogenous community, pro-local ideologies, the absorption of participation into existing organisational procedures, and the uncertainty of results-based evidence. This section then concludes with a review of four case studies which highlight how interpretations of participation in development projects are affected by the project’s unique circumstances. Lastly, Section 2.4 provides an overview of Mongolia including its history, current context, and relevant cultural aspects, and concludes with a review of three case studies that have described the practical aspects of participation within Mongolian rural development projects.

2.2 The Concept of ‘Participation’ in Development

2.2.1 Historical Overview
Since early development initiatives, the place and role of local people\(^1\) within development assistance has been multifarious, with the diversity covered over by umbrella-like terms such as ‘local participation’, ‘participatory development’, ‘community participation’, and ‘grass-roots development’. Throughout the modern development era, the participation of people within their own development trajectories has been understood in different ways, at different times, by different organisations and people, with wide-ranging implications.

\(^1\) The term ‘local people’ is used in this thesis to describe the intended ‘recipients’ or ‘beneficiaries’ of development assistance.
The beginning of the modern development era is typically traced back to January 20th, 1949, when President Truman of the United States of America delivered his inaugural address (Thomas, 2000). Point Four of this address announced the intention of the USA to:

Embark on a bold new program for making the benefits of our scientific advances and industrial progress available for the improvement and growth of under-developed areas. The old imperialism – exploitation for foreign profits – has no place in our plans. What we envisage is a programme of development based on the concepts of democratic fair dealing. (Truman, 1949, quoted in Esteva, 1992, p. 6).

Apparent in this speech is the emergence of democracy as a foundation of development assistance, in which citizen participation is an underlying principle (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). Meanwhile, of importance in Truman’s speech was the conceptualisation of poor nations as under-developed, compared to developed Western nations, which made a road-map to development possible (Dichter, 2003). Following the USA’s lead many other Western countries promised assistance to under-developed nations, leading to an ‘age of confidence’ in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s, in which the modernisation paradigm held the principal position within development thinking (Dichter, 2003).

The modernisation theory of development is based on the premise that for poorer nations to develop they need to follow the same pathways as rich or developed nations. Hence, development is undertaken in a prescriptive process of imitating developed nations and achieved through ‘blue-print’ planning that contains capital investments, science and technology transfers, urbanisation and industrialisation, and political and economic organisation (Dichter, 2003; Shepherd, 1998). Reflecting this thinking, development assistance up until the 1980s predominantly took the form of expert-led, predetermined, and ‘top-down’ approaches (Ellis & Biggs, 2001). During these decades the participation of local people in mainstream development initiatives typically mirrored its ‘blue-print’ nature, and as such, local participation was prescriptive and passive. Local people were seen as objects or controllable inputs of development assistance; consequently their participation equated to contributions during the implementation stages in the form of cash, resources, and labour, or an acceptance and efficient use of new technology (Lane, 1995; Nelson & Wright, 1995).

The modernisation theory has been criticised as being a one-dimensional approach to development, i.e. economic growth, with an entirety of factors, including culture, religion,
resources, nature and maturity of political systems, and local history all left out of the
development equation (Dichter, 2003; Perkins, Radelet & Lindauer, 2006). Moreover,
because the nation states, rather than their individual inhabitants, were seen as poor, local
people were left out of the development system. As a result, the modernisation theory
hypothesised that if nations themselves became rich, then the economic benefits would
‘trickle down’ to the poor who would then achieve development (Dichter, 2003).

The participation of local people in development initiatives, termed ‘local participation’,
although not a priority in mainstream development, had been a central concern of other
approaches to development from the 1940s to 1980s. Each of these approaches has its own
ideologies and theories regarding participation; hence local participation has taken various
forms (Hickey & Mohan, 2004). In the 1940s and 50s the ‘colonial community development’
approach was used in Africa, with community participation (self-reliance and cost sharing)
encouraged to produce stable communities to counteract socio-political changes (Hickey &
Mohan, 2004). Following this within the 1950s and 60s, ‘post-colonial community
development’ spread to over sixty countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as nations
achieved independence (Mansuri & Rao, 2003). This type of participatory development was
influenced largely by Ghandian notions of village self-reliance and cooperatives which would
curb the disenabling effects of modernisation and colonialism (Mansuri & Rao, 2003). In the
1960s to 70s, the ‘emancipatory participation’ approach, influenced by ‘Southern’ researchers
and educators, such as Friere, Fals Border, and Rahman, put forward a more radical,
politically transforming, empowering concept of participation (Hickey & Mohan, 2004;
McKinnon, 2006). Freire (1972) argued that for the oppressed to overcome their oppression, a
‘conscientization’ (i.e. a conscious knowledge of inequalities which leads to action against
oppressive elements) of the oppressed must take place. This conscientization would occur
through ‘dialogical action’ and needed the facilitation of a revolutionary leader to bring about
the emancipation of the poor and oppressed. The 1970s, 80s, and 90s saw the rise of the
‘alternative development’ approach, where the participation of local people (including the
poor and oppressed) within the seats of power, such as community governance, civic society,
and national government, was seen as a basic human right. Alternative development proposed
that development based upon cultural pluralism, territorialism, and sustainability, achievable
with local participation, would counteract the impoverishment and homogenisation occurring
in ‘mainstream’ development approaches (Hickey & Mohan, 2004).
Within the mainstream modernisation paradigm, local participation had typically, in some shape or form, been merely a component of development assistance, with little ethical or theoretical attention given to its actual purpose. However, during the 1980s, the concept of local participation was to gain increasing attention within development thinking, becoming almost synonymous with development itself.

2.2.2 A Paradigm Shift to ‘People-Centred’ Development

By the 1980s there was a common perception amongst the development community that the large-scale, ‘blue-print’ style development initiatives had failed to bring wide-ranging and sustainable benefits to the poor in developing countries (Shepherd, 1998; Mansuri & Rao, 2003). Meanwhile, local people had begun to demand inclusion in the decisions that affected them (Hayward, Simpson & Wood, 2004); and Southern grassroots development organisations were calling for ‘popular participation and transformation’ (Nelson & Wright, 1995). As a result, some authors have suggested a gradual paradigm shift from ‘blue-print’ to ‘people-centred’, or ‘process’ development has taken place (Shepherd, 1998; Ellis & Biggs, 2001). Blue-print style development’s emphasis on ‘things’ was labelled top-down, centralised, reductionist, and dependency-creating, while in contrast ‘process’ development’s emphasis on ‘people’ was seen to be bottom-up (or grass roots), decentralised, holistic, and empowering (Chambers, 1997).

Currently one of the central pillars within the people-centred paradigm is the participation of local people within development processes. For some organisations such participation means incorporating local knowledge, ideas, and labour resources into development initiatives to improve their efficiency and sustainability (Pretty, 1995; Shepherd, 1998). Furthermore, from an econometric view-point, Abraham and Platteau (2002) suggest that local communities have important informational advantages and therefore are better able to monitor project activities and mitigate incentive problems. However, for some authors, such as Robert Chambers (1995, 1997, 2005), local participation is related to the empowerment of the poor and marginalised resulting in increased local ownership of development initiatives.

Development writers contest that within the last two decades the word ‘participation’ has become ubiquitous in development circles, entering into almost every development activity, and firmly entrenching itself as a part of development ‘speak’ (Chambers, 2005; Marsland, 2006). For example, Parfitt notes, “It is clear that [participation] has become one of the central influences in mainstream development thinking” (2004, p. 737). and Michener states, “Today
the concept [of participation] has taken on the characteristic of a panacea; academic studies and policy lauding the benefits of participation has made it one of the most widely used concepts in development” (1998, p. 2105). The increase of participatory rhetoric has also been accompanied by an explosion of participatory methodologies within rural development, of which Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is the most highly publicised and therefore the most widely criticised technique (Chambers, 2005). PRA and other such methodologies use visual techniques, like ranking and mapping, to engage local people in collective knowledge-sharing which in turn forms the basis for community decision-making and steps towards development.

It appears that ‘participatory development’ is no longer a populist term which separates grassroots, more radical development organisations, from the large, bilateral, and multilateral development agencies. Instead, the opaque nature of participation allows development organisations, almost on polar ends of ideologies and practice, to incorporate the term ‘participation’ into their discourses. For instance, the World Bank, often criticised for hegemonic practices and a strong economic focus, views local participation as a foundational policy. This is evidenced in the establishment of a World Bank ‘Learning Group on Participatory Development’ in 1990; and the production of a ‘World Bank Participation Sourcebook’ in 1994. Furthermore, the World Bank’s lending for community-based development projects rose from US$ 325 million in 1996 to US$ 2 billion in 2003 (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). Meanwhile, World Vision, an international Christian NGO, is also able to embrace participatory practices, stating in its policy brief, “World Vision works through community participation, with the local people involved right from the beginning…helping to decide the needs of the community and how they will reach their goal” (World Vision, n.d.).

As participatory concepts increased in popularity within development circles, criticisms of participatory development also began to emerge (see Nelson & Wright, 1995; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). According to Cooke and Kothari (2001) criticisms arose from development field-work where participatory processes were undertaken ritualistically or turned out to be manipulative and harmed those they were suppose to empower. Such criticisms have typically taken two forms; firstly, they have settled on the techniques associated with participation, like PRA, and the need to re-examine methodological tools (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Parfitt, 2004). These criticisms have often come from within the participatory orthodoxy following Chambers’ call for a “self-critical epistemological awareness” as a central tenet of participatory ideology and practice (1997, p. 5). Secondly, criticisms have also been levelled
at the theoretical, political, and conceptual limitations of participation processes most notably the ambiguity of participatory concepts, the naivety of power, and participation’s reductionist tendencies (Cooke & Kothari, 2001, p. 5-6). Thus, moving into the 21st century, according to Hickey and Mohan, “The notion and practice of participation in international development stands at an uneasy crossroads, reviled in some academic and practitioner circles, yet as ubiquitous as ever in others” (2004, p. 3).

### 2.2.3 Definitions of Participation

According to many authors the concept of local stakeholder participation has become a shibboleth in development circles, an inherently ambiguous concept with no fixed meaning of universal truths (Mosse, 2004; Cook & Kothari, 2001). According to Marsland, “[Participation] is not quite an ‘empty category’, but it is able to contain a range of meanings…[so that]…it is possible for the different actors in a participatory project to proceed as if they are working to the same agenda, when, in fact, antagonistic pathways are being worked out” (2006, p. 65). Within development organisations, definitions of ‘participation’ vary widely and reflect the nature, ideology, political position, and culture of the definer. One of the earliest definitions from the United Nations Research Institute in Social Development (UNRISD) viewed ‘participation’ as:

> The organised efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations, on the part of groups and movements hitherto excluded from such control. (Pearse & Stiefel, 1979, cited in Cornwall & Brock, 2005).

This definition places those who are ‘excluded’ at the centre of participation, and emphasises ‘control’, which would entail shifts in power and decision-making to these ‘excluded’ people. In 1994, the World Bank defined ‘participatory development’ as:

> A process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions on resources which affect them. (Chambers 2005).

This definition also entails ‘control’ but the broadness of the term ‘stakeholders’ does not necessarily place the poor and weak at the centre of participation. Chambers (2005) notes that the World Bank definition was a negotiated definition, with ‘stakeholders’, being substituted for ‘primary stakeholders’ (meaning poor people) after protests by non-OECD governments that such a definition could constitute political interference in their internal affairs. Meanwhile in the World Bank’s definition the terms ‘share’ and ‘influence’ can contain a wide-range of
actualities, which are likely to depend on the willingness of those in power to relinquish control. In addition to organisations, various development authors have also defined participation. An oft cited definition is that of Irene Guijt’s, who stated:

The broad aim of participatory development is to increase the involvement of socially and economically marginalised peoples in decision-making over their own lives. (1998, p. 1).

This definition is more encompassing than the first two, as it not just includes local control over resources and development initiatives but also any decisions which affect local people’s lives. Lane (1995) suggests that power is the contested element in defining participation, finding that, “Empowerment of the poor is what African NGOs understand by participation; yet many Northern NGOs consider it either unimportant or irrelevant” (p. 188). This is certainly true in the above definitions, where the degree of the shift in power or control from the powerful to the poor and marginalised is the indefinable and therefore contestable issue. Meanwhile, local stakeholder definitions of ‘participation’ are also unlikely to achieve consensus, and vary at the community and individual level according to linguistics, history, culture, religion, socio-economic circumstances, past experiences, etc.

Cornwall and Brock (2005) suggest that linguistically, participation has been reconfigured in ‘chains of equivalence’ with other development buzzwords like ‘empowerment’ and ‘poverty reduction’. The result is that these individual words have lost their own unique meanings, which now reside in the connections between the various terms. Therefore, such terms evoke a comforting mutuality and reassuring consensus without a clear understanding of the implications of their usage (Cornwall and Brock, 2005, p. 1045).

2.2.4 Conceptualising Local Participation in Development Projects

Following on from its various definitions, the concept of local participation within development projects has also taken a conglomeration of forms. Peter Oakley (1991) describes three broad conceptualisations of local participation within projects: participation as contribution, participation as organisation, and participation as empowerment. In the first conceptualisation, participation implies voluntary or other forms of contributions by local people to predetermined projects; local people do not determine the nature of the project’s aim, objectives, or activities. Interestingly, in 1991 in the early years of mainstream participatory development, Oakley viewed this as, “…the dominant interpretation of
participation in development projects in the third world” (p. 8). Secondly, participation is conceptualised as the organisation of people into collective groups, such as co-operatives, farmers’ associations, etc. These organisations are either externally conceived or introduced, or else they can emerge and take structure as a result of a participatory process. Lastly, within participation as empowerment, a transfer of power to local people takes place. This can occur as people develop the skills and abilities within the project to better negotiate with existing development delivery systems, or as people make decisions and take actions which they deem essential to their development. Furthermore, Oakley views the primacy of people as a principle of truly participatory development, meaning poor people should become the subjects rather than the objects of projects. According to Oakley (1991, p. 161), this would require an act of faith in local people (by development professionals) that, whatever their conditions of poverty and oppression, with external help but not domination, local people are able to transform their own environments. Some questions remain, however; for example, who determines the extent and character of this ‘help’, and must local people also subscribe to this same ‘faith’?

Robert Chambers, a central proponent of participatory theory and methodology, suggests participation in projects can take three main forms (1995). Firstly, participation can be used as a cosmetic label, simply applied to project documentation to make whatever is proposed look ‘good’ in the eyes of external audiences. Secondly, participation can mean ‘they’ (the local people) participate in ‘our’ (the development agency’s) project. As a result, decision-making, control and power remain with the development agency, with participation used as a co-opting practise to mobilise local labour and reduce costs. Thirdly, participation can mean local people do their own analysis, take command of the project, and make their own decisions; essentially, ‘we’ (the development agency) participate in ‘their’ (the local people’s) project. Chambers (1997) suggests that this third form of participation is an empowering process, with a shift of power to those who are local and poor. Therefore this form of participation is seen to truly fit the people-centred development paradigm and is championed by Chambers as ‘real’ or ‘genuine’ participation (1995, 1997, 2005).

A number of authors have sought to categorise participation’s various forms through ‘ladders of participation’, for example Arnstein, 1969; Cohen and Uphoff, 1980; Pretty, 1995; White, 1996; and Chambers 2005. These typologies are helpful in that they unpack participation by showing how diverse interpretations of participation exist, and how each interpretation will overtly shape the nature and direction of development projects. One of the simplest typologies
is that of Samuel Paul (1997), who describes four levels of participation based on donor-beneficiary relationships: information sharing, consultation, decision-making, and initiating action. In the first level, the development organisations inform local people of the project, and information and control therefore flows downwards from organisation to local people. Within the consultation level, information flows are more equal and the agency utilises local knowledge but still retains control. In decision-making participation, local people are involved in decision-making processes but the extent is controlled by the development agency. In the final level, local people initiate all actions and therefore information and control flow from local people to the development organisation.

A more extensive ladder is provided by Pretty in his 1995 ‘Typology of Participation’. Pretty suggested that the lower four levels of his participatory ladder (see Table: 1) would have no lasting, positive effect on people’s lives and hence could be deemed non-participatory or manipulative (1995, p. 1253). A compilation of Pretty’s (1995) and Chambers’ (2005) typology representations is presented in Table 1.

Arnstein (1969) points out that these ladders are but a simplification, with gradations of participation infinitesimal, so that in practice it may be impossible to clearly distinguish between each rung on the ladder. However, Hayward et al. (2004) argue that ladders still suggest a hierarchical relationship, with higher levels of participation considered ‘true’ participation and a goal to be achieved. This value-laden view of participation bypasses a number of points. Firstly, it delegitimizes lower levels of participation that may be selected by development organisations for ethical, moral, or practical reasons (Chambers, 2005). Furthermore, Hayward et al. (2004) suggest that lower-levels of participation or even non-participation may, in themselves, be an empowering process for the poor. Secondly, as noted by Chambers (2005) these ladders do not show the equity of participation, i.e. who wins and gains from participating in projects. For example, projects which have high-levels of participation may be gender blind and thus exclusive in nature and reinforce poverty cycles. Chambers goes on to suggest that ladders of participation need to be qualified by ladders of equity (2005). Hence projects may require authoritarian, non-participatory interventions to ensure the poor and weak gain access to the project’s benefits. Moreover, ladders do not always indicate at which stage of the project cycle participation takes place, which means that at certain visible stages the project may be highly participatory, but overall the project remains consultative in nature.
Table 1: A Typology of Participation: How People Participate in Development Projects (adapted from Pretty, 1995; Chambers, 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Roles/Relationship Outsiders’ Local Peoples’</th>
<th>Outsiders’ Actions Local peoples’</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Self Mobilisation</td>
<td>Local people take initiative independent of external institutions. They maintain control over how external resources and technical advice are used. Institutions need to provide an enabling framework of support.</td>
<td>Supporter Owner/Controller</td>
<td>Support Initiate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Interactive Participation</td>
<td>Participation is seen as a right, not just a means, to achieving project goals. People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans, and formation/strengthening of local institutions. Groups take control over local decisions and determine use of available resources.</td>
<td>Facilitator/Analyst/Catalyst Agent/Actor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Functional Participation</td>
<td>Participation is seen by external agencies as a means to achieve the projects’ goals, especially reduced costs. People form groups to meet predetermined objectives. Participation may be interactive and entail shared decision-making but this may arise after major decisions have been made by external agencies.</td>
<td>Co-equal partner Co-equal partner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Participation for Material Incentives</td>
<td>People participate by contributing resources (e.g. labour) in return for material incentives (like food or cash). People are not involved in a learning process and therefore have no stake in prolonging technologies and/or practices when the incentives end.</td>
<td>Employer/Worker/Economiser Collaborator</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Participation by Consultation</td>
<td>People participate by being consulted or being asked questions. External agents define problems and the information gathering process and therefore control analysis. Professionals are under no obligation to take on board local people’s views.</td>
<td>Researcher Informant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Passive Participation</td>
<td>People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. The information being shared belongs only to external professionals.</td>
<td>Dictator Listener</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Manipulative Participation</td>
<td>Participation is simply a pretence, with 'people’s’ representatives sitting on committees, though they are not elected and have no power.</td>
<td>Manipulator Puppet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While ladders of participation and equity are helpful in clarifying participation, they do not expose the forces which influence the ability of local people to participate in development projects. Instead ladders assume that local people should and therefore will, if given the opportunity, navigate towards higher-level participatory projects. However, this is not necessarily true as local peoples’ past experiences, cultural norms, poverty, power, governance structures, etc., may mean they do not prioritise higher-level participation or view the higher-levels of participation as the ‘true’ or ‘genuine’ form.

2.2.5 The Purpose of Participation

Development literature also discusses participation with regards to its purpose or role within development projects. The purpose of participation is commonly dichotomised into participation as a means or participation as an ends (or end goal) with means participation linked to lower levels of the participation typology and ends participation the higher levels (Oakley, 1991; Nelson & Wright, 1995).

Firstly, participation as a means or tool implies a project where local participation is used to accomplish a project’s predetermined goals more efficiently, effectively, or cheaply (Nelson & Wright, 1995). Participation, in this regard, is a way of harnessing the existing physical, social, and economic resources of local people in order to ensure the project is successful; hence, the final results of participation are important, rather than the actual act of participation itself (Oakley, 1991). In the modernisation paradigm, exogenous ‘blue-print’ development initiatives often paid little attention to local skills, knowledge, and contexts (Shepherd, 1998). To counteract this tendency, local participation in a project’s planning stages is viewed as a useful tool for development organisations to increase the accuracy of the project’s information base and thus its socio-cultural, economic, and political appropriateness (Leeuwis, 2000; Hayward et al., 2004). It is hypothesised that through participation as a means (contributions and consultation) local people are more likely to agree and support development initiatives, which leads to increased effectiveness and sustainability (Pretty, 1995). Thus, participation as a means is closely aligned with the lower-levels of participation where local people participate by contributing to the project within a preset framework, rather than participating to determine their own development agenda.

Michener (1998) suggests that when participation is used as a means, projects remain in the old paradigm of ‘blue-print’ development as project planning and planners retain the central focus. Additionally, Parfitt (2004) contends that, in means participation, power relations
remain untouched, and therefore, the traditional, top-down, external- or expert-driven approach to development still remains.

Secondly, participation can be seen as the end goal of a development project or as an end itself and is linked to the higher-levels of the participation typology and empowerment. Nelson and Wright describe this participatory approach as “where the community or groups sets up a process to control its own development” (1995, p. 1). In contrast to a means approach, this form of a participatory project may start without any predetermined objectives and aims (Oakley, 1991). Rather, the project’s direction and framework will evolve over time and arise from the active and dynamic interactions of local people with one another, the development organisation, and local institutions. The purpose, therefore, of end goal participatory projects is the development and strengthening of local people’s capabilities to direct development initiatives, or even initiate their own development (Oakley, 1991). Authors suggest that this form of participation has a greater propensity to empower the local people, as through the project’s activities local people acquire the skills, knowledge, experiences, and opportunities to engage in their own development agendas and their self-esteem, confidence, and collective consciousness increases (Chambers, 1995; Lane, 1995; Michener, 1998). Moreover, in this approach ideological principles are embraced, whereby the development actors have a moral right and/or duty to ensure local people influence and direct any efforts to change their own situation (Leeuwis, 2000, p. 933). Authors, such as Friedman (1992) and Parfitt (2004) contend that this view of participation is ‘politically radical’ and emancipative because it seeks to redress unequal power relations and liberate the poor from their oppressors.

Authors such as Cleaver (1999) and Hayward et al. (2004) suggest that a conflation is possible, with participation acting to bring about both increased project efficiency (means) and empowerment (ends) of beneficiaries. However, Craig and Porter (1997) argue that due to the ‘double accountability’ in projects, this sort of synergy is unlikely. Development projects are accountable to intended beneficiaries, i.e. they need to create opportunities for local people to direct and control the project, while projects must also be accountable to the source of funding and therefore effectively managed. Craig and Porter suppose that “…these two aims, participation, and effective management are deeply contradictory” (1997, p. 229), because participation means transference of control to local people, while effective management requires central control to meet pre-existing objectives. According to Craig and
Porter (1997), projects tend to be more ‘managed’ than ‘participatory’, with the balance of control and power remaining with the donor organisations and their staff.

2.2.6 Participation and Empowerment

Within the development literature, participation is closely linked to the concepts of ‘power’ or ‘empowerment’ with, typically, higher levels of participation seen as the more empowering (Oakley, 1991). However, depending on the author’s understanding of participation and its practical applications, contrasting views on the links between participation and empowerment exist. Participation is said to bring a transfer of power to those who are local and poor, i.e. ‘empowerment’ (Chambers, 1997), or to result in the reinforcement of the existing power relations which keep the poor and marginalised entrenched in their circumstances of poverty (Cooke & Kothari, 2001). The following section will provide a brief overview of the main conceptualisations of empowerment.

Empowerment, in a similar vein to ‘participation’, is described as an ambiguous term, “used in a way which presupposes that the reader or listener will know what is meant….The term may be used merely to communicate good intentions, and to imply some unspecified recognition of the need for changes in the distribution of power” (Rowlands, p. 7). The concept of empowerment is linked to its root word ‘power’ and therefore, in the context of development initiatives, denotes an increase in the power of local people (Rowlands, 1997).

Power is generally divided into four aspects: ‘power to’, ‘power within’, ‘power with’, and ‘power over’. ‘Power to’ refers to the unique potential of every person to shape, direct, and control his or her life in the world, and is also referred to as an individual’s generative or productive power (Nelson & Wright, 1995; Chambers, 2005). Important to this aspect of power are relationships – power is not individual but is present within multiple and diverse social relations – and also knowledge – understanding the situation enables people to act (Nelson & Wright, 1995; Rowlands, 1997). Increases in ‘power to’ are linked to gains of ‘power within’, which is described as self-worth, self-confidence, and inner spiritual strength (Chambers, 2005). Additionally ‘power to’ will grow through ‘power with’, that is the solidarity and collective strength of uniting with others, or as Rowlands describes, “a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of the individuals, especially when a group tackles a problem together” (1997, p. 13). In this regard, Rowlands (1992) notes that, following an expanding ‘power to’, marginalised people will encounter situations where the control of
resources is controlled by outside agencies, and for the marginalised group to develop they must be able to engage such people and institutions in decision-making processes.

This leads to the next aspect of power called ‘power over’, which is controlling power, the ability to exert control, influence, and dominate other people (Chambers, 2005). Within this ‘power over’ understanding, power can be conceived of as ‘zero-sum’; there is a fixed amount of power in relationships and systems (Nelson & Wright, 1995). Thus, if one party gained more power it would be at the expense of another, which can lead to resistance and conflict as the powerful would have to relinquish power in the development process. On the other hand, power can also be seen as ‘variable-sum’; people do not have to give it up or have it taken away for empowerment of others to happen (Craig & Mayo, 1995, cited in Johansen, 2003). Such an understanding has led Chambers (2005) and Rowlands (1997) to hypothesise that the role of development workers should be that of ‘facilitators’ in that they facilitate the empowerment of local people without having to give up or bestow their own power. However, Rowlands cautions that, because true empowerment comes from within and cannot be bestowed, genuine empowering projects may take unanticipated directions and therefore outside professionals cannot expect to control development outcomes (1995, p. 104).

Rowlands (1997) suggests that our understanding of empowerment within the development context arises from these four divisions of power. Firstly, from ‘power over’, empowerment involves bringing those who are outside the decision-making processes into them. Within development projects this entails local people making key decisions which will lead and direct the projects’ activities. This understanding places importance on projects that enable local people to better engage in formal and political decision-making, and projects that provide local people with an ability to gain an income, enabling them to participate in economic decision-making (Rowlands, 1997, p. 13). Secondly, arising from ‘power to’ and ‘power with’, empowerment entails a process where people become aware of their own interests and how they relate to the interests of others. This enables local people to participate in decision-making processes from a position of greater strength, and actually influence these decisions (Rowlands, 1997, p. 14). Thirdly, drawing from ‘power to’ and ‘power within’, empowerment must also involve undoing any negative social constructs, so that “people come to see themselves as having the capacity and right to act and influence decisions” (Rowlands, 1997, p. 14).
Rowlands (1997) and Freidman (1992) have suggested that, typically, a sequence of empowerment occurs, where the various forms of power build upon one another. Friedman conceptualises households, rather than individuals as possessing social, political, and psychological power (1992, p. 33). Social power is concerned with the access of the household to certain ‘bases’ of productive wealth, such as information, knowledge and skills, social institutions, and financial resources. Secondly, political power is associated with the access of individual household members to the processes by which decisions, especially those that impact on their lives, are made. This includes not only the power to vote, but the power to voice one’s opinion, and the power of collective action. Lastly, physiological power is described as an individual’s sense of potency. Friedman (1992) further suggests that political empowerment of households would require a prior process of social empowerment, and from these power gains, psychological empowerment results and further reinforces these power increases. Likewise, Rowlands indicates a sequence of empowerment, stating, “Individuals are empowered when they are able to maximise opportunities available to them without constraint” (1997, p. 13). Thus, prior to decision-making or ‘power over’ empowerment, one’s decision-making capacity must increase through gains in ‘power to’ and ‘power with’, with an initial grasping of one’s needs and rights to engage in decision-making processes, i.e. ‘power within’, the pivotal first step.

Meanwhile, Oakley (1991) adds another dimension to the empowerment discourse by differentiating between two types of ‘participation as empowerment’ in rural development. In the first type, empowerment is “the development of skills and abilities to enable rural people to manage better, have a say in or negotiate with existing development systems” (Oakley, 1991, p. 9). These existing systems of development can include local and national government agencies, international development agencies, NGOs, and other forms of assistance and help. In this sense, empowerment is concerned with increasing local people’s capacity to access and influence the type of activities normative development systems provide. Hence, empowerment allows local people to better participate within existing systems; thus, development projects which focus on this form of empowerment can be labelled ‘systems maintaining’ (Shepherd, 1998). Meanwhile, the second type of empowerment is “more fundamental and essentially concerned with enabling rural people to decide upon and to take actions which they believe are essential to their development” (Oakley, 1991, p. 9). This type of empowerment would occur as local people gain the skills, knowledge, and ability to begin their own independent development process. In such a process local people would define their own problems, needs, and solutions without having to necessarily negotiate them with the
existing development systems. This process implies relative autonomy from traditional development structures. However, given enough local freedom and decision-making latitude, it may also occur within an existing development system, such as an external development project (Johansen, 2003). This could be labelled a ‘systems transforming’ project, because the traditional development systems are transformed as local people take control and direct its activities (Shepherd, 1998).

It appears that this latter type of ‘participation as empowerment’ as defined by Oakley is to a large degree the form of empowerment which Robert Chambers advocates in his writings (1995, 1997, 2005). For example, Chambers describes participation as “an empowering process which enables local people to do their own analysis, to take command, to gain in confidence, and to make their own decisions” (1995, p. 30). Chambers insists that issues of power are at the core of people’s lives and interactions with one another, and hence pervasive in development assistance. Chambers views these human relationships as hierarchical, consisting of uppers, those with more power, and lowers, those with less power. These binary relationships are said to pervade development initiatives; consequently, uppers are the structures and people which exert control within development, such as development agencies and their staff. Meanwhile, lowers are the recipients of aid and projects, like poor countries and project beneficiaries. In this regard, empowerment is the process where the transformation or reversals of these hierarchical power relations takes place, i.e. a shift in power from uppers to lowers, which equates to local decision-making and control in development projects (Chambers, 1995).

For empowerment to take place, Chambers places the onus on dominant uppers, especially development workers, to transform:

The roles of dominant uppers have then to change. From planning, issuing orders, transferring technology, and supervising, they shift to convening, facilitating, searching for what people need, and supporting. From being teachers they become facilitators of learning. They seek out the poor and weaker, bring them together, and enable them to conduct their own appraisal and analysis, and take their own action. The dominant uppers ‘hand over the stick’, sit down, listen and learn themselves. (Chambers, 1995, p. 34)

The above-mentioned ‘handing over of the stick’ is an oft quoted analogy for the transference of power that takes place through participatory techniques, such as PRA, with these
techniques giving development workers the opportunity to “…confront and transform over centralized power…to meet the over arching challenge: to enable and empower those who are marginalised, powerless and poor to gain for themselves the better life that is their right” (Chambers, 2005, p. 115). Moreover, Chambers stresses that underpinning this ‘handing over of the stick’ is an attitude and behavioural change in development workers, including ideals of humility, being nice, not interrupting, and not being judgemental (2005, p. 163). In terms of power relations, Chambers argues that such a change will allow development worker’s ‘power over’ local people to be transformed into ‘power to’ empower local people. Through this process development workers will not lose but gain power as their control-orientation induced stress levels decrease, and their satisfaction and fulfilment of doing what is right increases (Chambers, 2005, p. 209).

While these conceptualisations of power and empowerment are enlightening, they tend to ignore the fact that ‘empowerment’, like other development concepts, does not have a universal definition or moral value. Rather articulations of power are often invisible and embedded in social and cultural practices (Cooke & Kothari, p. 14). This means that current development ideals of participation that empower local people could run contrary to the values a particular culture assigns to ‘power’ and the ‘powerful’, while local people may not even desire or identify with the concept of power shifts and local decision-making and control.

2.2.7 The Benefits of Participation

The purpose of development initiatives is to improve the lives of the poor and marginalised; hence participation in a project should bring benefits to the local people. These local benefits of participation are often divided into two groups, tangibles and intangibles, with the former typically linked to lower levels of participation, and the latter associated with higher levels (Oakley, 1991; Hayward et al., 2004).

Tangible benefits are the material or physically measureable outcomes that participating in a project brings to the local community or local people, for example, a school, new farming equipment, or an increase in a households crop yield (Hayward et al., 2004). Oakley (1991, p. 199) describes these tangible benefits as the ‘economic base’ of rural development projects, arguing they are the key dimension for the promotion of participation for three reasons. Firstly, they act as an incentive by providing local people with visible evidence of the tangible results derived from their active involvement. Secondly, because of the link between
educational uptake and practical action, economic activities develop the resource base of local people while also promoting solidarity and self confidence. Lastly, projects which focus solely on education or awareness-creation activities often lose direction as they lack a strong central focus and thus provoke frustration among participants. Furthermore, Oakley (1991) notes that the tangible benefits can either be externally designed and structured, the traditional top-down approach, or internally derived, i.e. local participants independently or in discussion with the development agency decide upon the inputs, activities, and direction of the project.

Intangible benefits are the non-material or internalised outcomes that a project can bring to individuals or communities, such as empowerment, increases in social capital, self confidence, managerial and organisational skills, and knowledge and skills (Pretty, 1995). Since Putman’s description of ‘social capital’ as “the features of organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (1994, p. 167), it has gained increasing prominence in the development literature as one of the key intangible benefits of participatory projects (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). It is proposed that, within the personal interactions that occur in participatory projects, local people will create and/or strengthen linkages with one another and local institutions. These linkages take the form of social networks, norms of cooperation and reciprocity, and trust, described as ‘social capital’ (Upton, 2008a). This increase in social capital will in turn assist in the success and sustainability of the project’s activities, and will also have a positive, flow-on effect on the non-project lives of local people. According to Grootaert, Narayan, Jones, and Woolcock (2004, p. 4), social capital is manifest in three forms: ‘bonding’ – linkages to people who are similar in terms of their demographics, e.g. friends, relatives, neighbours, work colleagues, etc.; ‘bridging’ – linkages to people who do not share many of the same characteristics; and ‘linking’ – linkages to people in positions of authority, such as government officials, bankers, village headman, etc. Arising from critiques of the social capital concept, specifically the reinforcement of inhibitory power relations and reverse causality, authors have argued that ‘social capital’ needs to be viewed as a deeply contextual social construct (Mansuri & Rao, 2004, p. 10). This would lead us to believe that the other intangible benefits, and even the tangible benefits of projects, are equally only definable in the light of the local culture and context.

Authors, such as Chambers (1997, 2005) and Pretty (1995), have suggested that the higher levels of local participation such as ‘interactive participation’ and ‘self mobilisation’ will result in increased intangible benefits, such as empowerment. However, according to Kumar
and Corbridge (2002) the prioritising of intangible benefits like empowerment in participatory projects assumes that the poor are less interested in physical benefits than they are in learning to act on their own behalf. Oakley (1991) also highlighted this dilemma and used the following quotation by Bhasin (1985) to argue that the gap between an emphasis solely on the tangible benefits or intangible benefits of participation needs addressed:

The poor are not going to be interested in consciousness-raising for its own sake. All consciousness-raising must lead to an improvement in their material conditions and vice-versa. In fact this dichotomy between organisational work and programmes for economic development is false and misleading. The economic position of the poor can be improved by removing scarcity and exploitation and if these two tasks go on simultaneously, it is of course ideal. (p. 202)

The question remains, however, as to what local people prioritise as the benefits of development projects and how this will affect the way in which they engage with participatory concepts?

2.2.8 Motivations to Participate

Within the literature on ‘participatory’ development, only a small portion of it has described or discussed the factors which motivate people to participate in development projects. As Cleaver comments, “the participatory literature is often rather vague on the incentives which will persuade people to participate” (1999, p. 605). Despite this lack of attention, three main incentives to participate are commonly alluded to by development authors (Oakley, 1991; Friedman, 1992; Brett, 1996; Cleaver, 1999; Chambers, 2005). Firstly, ‘economic rationality’ has been given as a key reason why local people participate in projects. In this concept, local people calculate that it is in their best interests economically to participate, based on the assurance of individual project benefits. This incentive is based on the model of the ‘rational economic man’ who, as a utility-maximising being, uses a material-based cost/benefit analysis to guide his or her decisions about a development project (Friedman, 1992). Secondly, authors have suggested that there are non-economic or ‘social’ reasons why local people participate in projects. According to Cleaver (1999), these social reasons can include psychological motivations (such as a need for respect, recognition, or purpose) and societal norms or cultural values, where participation in a project is seen as socially responsible and the ‘correct’ way to act. Furthermore, anthropologists have suggested that ‘sociality’ is an innate characteristic of human beings, and hence the collective action element of participatory
projects becomes a key incentive (Eyben & Ladbury, 1995). However, in this view, it is not the economic gains from collective action which motivate but the state of being together with other people or ‘comradeship’, i.e. the sense of a common purpose. Thirdly, apparent in the writings of Robert Chambers and others (see Hickey & Mohan, 2004) is the idea that local people will be motivated to participate in projects in order to influence decision-making processes which affect them. This third incentive to participate in a project could thus be termed ‘polity’, and seen as motivating local people to participate in a project where their decisions determine the project’s direction, or motivating people to participate in a project which seeks to engage with local institutions of power, such as the local government or village council.

While there are significant gaps with regards to an understanding of the motivating factors in participatory projects, it appears that this element of ‘participation’ is also highly contextual and individual. Moreover, Cleaver points out that in dealing with motivations individuals need to be viewed as positioned in multiple social relations, governed by specific social identities which will change over time and vary greatly from person to person (1999). Thus motivating factors for participation are likely to be not only highly complex, but also a critical element in establishing a participatory strategy that operates in line with the local culture.

2.1.9 Clarifying Participation

Due to its ambiguity and surrounding contentions, a number of authors have suggested that within development projects the term ‘participation’ should not be employed without appropriate clarification (Pretty, 1995; Michener, 1998). Cornwall and Brock (2005) suggest that this classification could entail adding adjectives to participation in order to mark out a distinction in meanings. This would mean that rather than projects being solely labelled ‘participatory’, they are instead categorised according to participation typologies, to become ‘consultative’ projects, ‘partnership’ projects, etc. In addition, Lane (1995) and Hussein (1995) suggest that certain questions should be answered to provide a framework of participation; these include: exactly who is participating; in what stage of the project will participation take place; what type of participation is being used, will it be consultative, interactive, etc; how does the participation occur, is it voluntary, coercive, or ad hoc; why is participation being used; and what are the results of participation.

Meanwhile, Harrison (2002) proposes that, within development circles, some of the attractiveness of using the term ‘participation’ lies in its slipperiness. On the one hand, the
term can denote an empowering of the poor and marginalised which evokes thoughts of altruism and emancipation; while on the other hand, it can contain the traditional, ‘expert knows best’ project which objectifies the poor into units of labour. Thus, for traditional top-down projects, clarifying participation may not be in the development organisation’s best interest, as the ambiguity of the term can serve the purpose of legitimising or even gifting a morality of emancipation to its initiatives.

2.3 Quandaries of Participation

Following the increasing ubiquity of participation within development circles, a growing number of critics have pointed to quandaries within both participatory theory and practice (Mosse, 1994, 2001, 2004; Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Kapoor, 2002). It is evident that within development initiatives there typically exists a gap between the rhetoric of empowering participation and the realities of development field work in which significant barriers to higher level participation of the poor and marginalised are apparent. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to identify all such issues; however, a number of key participation quandaries will be summarised and discussed under the following headings: the myth of a homogenous community; pro-local ideologies; the absorption of participation into existing organisational procedures; and the uncertainty of results-based evidence. Through the discussion of these issues it will become apparent that one universal form of participation cannot be viewed as the ‘best practice’ for development projects. Rather, participation is a complex concept which stakeholders will engage with and interpret depending upon their worldviews, socio-economic situations, local context, culture, and past experiences. In this regard, this section will finish with a review of pertinent ethnographic case studies that show how the discourses of participatory development are assimilated into project realities.

2.3.1 The Myth of a Homogenous Community

The vision of the empowering participatory approach is for the poor, marginalised, and powerless to benefit from development interventions (Chambers, 2005). Nonetheless, Guijt and Shah point out that, “Despite the stated intentions of social inclusion, it has become clear that many participatory development initiatives do not deal well with the complexity of community differences” (1998, p. 1). Projects frequently work within stated frameworks and aims of ‘community’ participation and ‘community’ development. Guijt and Shah (1998), however, contest the use of the term ‘community’, arguing that it is an overly simplistic notion which views ‘communities’ as harmonious, homogenous, internally equitable
collectives in which people share common needs and interests. Rather, Guijt and Shah (1998) note that the concept of ‘community’ covers up differences in age, race, gender, caste, religion, poverty, political ideologies, etc., meaning ‘community’ projects can mask complex power-relations and divergent interests.

Guijt & Shah (1998) argue that an inadequate understanding of the internal dynamics within communities can mean public participatory techniques are biased towards those members who already wield power. Kapoor suggests that participatory methodologies, such as PRA, are built upon Habermas’s notion of an ‘ideal speech situation’ in which “there is uncoerced rational dialogue among free and equal participants: the discussion is inclusive...coercion free...and open” (2002, p. 105). Such an ideal is far removed from the realities of a complex community full of diversity. The poor and marginalised may lack the time or opportunity to attend public participatory workshops, and if they do attend, their voice is likely to be excluded or dismissed. As Kapoor (2002) and Mosse (1994) note, the public communicative domain is privileged within participatory techniques, thus undervaluing the private sphere. For example, women because of cultural norms or high workloads may be actively excluded from attending public meetings, voicing their opinion, or unable to publicly disagree with older women or male attendees (Guijt & Shah, 1998). Consequently, public participatory exercises can mask the more invisible problems and power imbalances, such as gender disparities and domestic abuses (Mosse, 1994). Meanwhile, Kumar and Corbridge (2002) point out that participatory committees and meetings are often dominated or captured by the social elite and privileged, a situation which fits within the past experiences of the poor and excluded as well as a fatalistic worldview (Dodd, 1998).

According to Cleaver (1999), there is a strong assumption amongst participatory projects that a unitary local community exists and this should be the entity with which participatory efforts engage. Moreover, Mosse (2001), and Cleaver (1999) both suggest that such a definable community is desired by many development organisations as it simplifies the local situation and removes conflict, which enables participatory techniques to be controllable and result in conformity. However, Cleaver (1999, p. 603) argues that the definition of ‘community’ is highly subjective and shifting amongst even local people, while community boundaries which weaken such unitary assumptions are often physically and socially permeable. For example, Harrison (2002) found that in Ethiopian rural development projects the use of concepts like ‘community’ or even ‘village’ was problematic because these concepts scarcely existed within society and thus the word has no direct translation.
Chambers’ binary notions of power (uppers and lowers) have been critiqued as being over-simplistic and therefore masking community imperfections (Kothari, 2001). Kothari (2001) suggests that in Chambers’ writings participatory methodologies adopt a framework in which local people or micro institutions are seen as powerless, set in opposition to the powerful professional or macro institutions, such as the development organisations. According to Kothari (2001) this focus assumes those who wield power are only located at institutional centres, and hence glosses over the fact that imbalances in power are also pervasive but not so visible within the local community. A more holistic picture of power would reveal power imbalances are pervasive within any community relationships. In addition, Luke (1974, cited in Nelson & Wright, 1995, p.9) suggests that the interests and power of dominant parties can be perceived amongst community members as the natural state of affairs or even as god-given, distributed through society by relations of gender, race, class, etc. Thus, community participatory techniques with an emphasis on the active involvement of all its members may run against or be engulfed by cultural norms. Consequently it would seem that conflicts may arise or participatory techniques are discarded when culturally and historically embedded hierarchical structures are bypassed in the name of empowerment.

2.3.2 Pro-Local Ideologies

The concept of participation is grounded in principles of privileging local people, including local knowledge. For those who conceptualise participation as a ‘means’, local knowledge has a partial role in development projects. Local knowledge is viewed as a functional necessity that assists the development organisation’s management, and as such it is seen as a product (Mohan & Stoke, 2000). In contrast, when participation is conceptualised as an ‘end goal’, local knowledge holds the pivotal role within development projects. In this regard, the conscious awakening and sharing of local knowledge facilitates the empowerment of local people to take over their own development (Mohan & Stoke, 2000). Both these ideologies are encapsulated in the current development paradigm of people-centred development, which has also been termed ‘pro-local’ development. Thus, according to Mohan and Stoke (2000), within development assistance a shift in focus has occurred, from projects relying on ‘Western’ or ‘expert’ knowledge, to projects based upon local knowledge and skills, with the change aptly termed ‘the valorisation of the local’ (p. 252). As a result of this pro-local ideology, an epistemological and ontological lens is brought into development, although the extent to which it changes assistance mechanisms will vary according to the user.
Alongside the perceived failure of early development approaches, McKinnon (2006) suggests that ‘pro-localism’ has arisen as an expression of the moral and ethical duty development workers feel they have towards the poor. According to McKinnon (2006), because in early development discourses local people were conceptualised as ‘needy’ and ‘poor’ the ethical duty of development professionals was to *intervene* in order to do ‘good’. However, within the ‘people-centred’ paradigm the ethical priority is given to the needs, desires and perspectives of the Third World Other (McKinnon, 2006, p. 27). Thus, advocates of participatory approaches have to varying degrees abandoned the claim to be able to represent the sole objective truth. This means altruism has taken on a new apparition for development workers, an ethical responsibility to the poor, which is evidenced within Robert Chambers’ morality-based catch-cries of ‘putting the last first and the first last’ and ‘whose reality counts?’ (1995, 1997).

Mohan and Stoke argue that within participatory methodologies (notably PRA) there is a tendency to essentialise and romanticise ‘the local’ (2000, p.249). This means ‘local knowledge’ and ‘social systems’ are often treated as naturally benign, and hence not open to problematic debate (Kapoor, 2002). However, practices such as female circumcision or bonded child labour are both examples of local knowledge and social systems which should be contestable on moral and ethical grounds. According to Dichter (cited in Michener, 1998), pro-local advocates have overly romantic notions of altruism in poor communities so that the poor are seen as naturally benign and truthful. However, research has suggested that the poor, just like other people, will lie and mislead others to protect their own interests and gain from the lucrative aid ‘game’ (Michener, 1998; Chhotray, 2004). Cleaver (1999) points out that one common result of essentialising the local has been the adoption of local institutions, such as NGOs, as project-partners by development agencies. Nevertheless, local institutions are also affected by the critiques of ‘Western’ development organisations (power imbalances, experts, egos, assumptions, etc.) which means the involvement of these local institutions may be the only ‘local’ participation a project actually achieves.

The contrary approach of championing the ‘local’ is the negation of the ‘non-local’ and the ‘depoliticising’ of development (Kapoor, 2002; Mosse, 2004). Kapoor (2000), amongst others, argues that participatory methods have a narrow view of power, often failing to take into account wider contexts which affect change. Mohan and Stoke (2000, p. 249) describe this neglect as ‘liberal populism’, contesting the tendency to view the local in isolation from local, national, and international socio-economic and political forces. In this regard, Cleaver
(1999) notes that a ‘pro-local’ orientation can exist among development workers so that local communities are often understood to be capable of almost anything. Hence, participation which leads to empowerment is understood as all that is needed to unleash a community’s latent and unlimited capacity to develop. Cleaver (1999) suggests that the evidence does not support such a claim, “Rather there is significant evidence of very real or structural and resource constraints operational on communities, most severely impacting on those which may need development the most” (p. 604).

This highlights the important point that, by focusing on local peoples’ participation, the considerable resource, structural, psychological, and social constraints that the poor face are often downplayed. Mohan and Stoke (2000) suggest that in an attempt to combat the past ‘blue-print’ mentality, where locals were treated as passive recipients of development, the reverse has almost taken place, and now the individual agent has become the key sight of change. This is apparent in Robert Chambers’ writings (1997, 2005) where, although many levels of causality in underdevelopment are acknowledged, he chooses to focus on the ‘primacy of the individual’, whereby ‘we are much of the problem’ and the insider/outsider division is central to blocking development (1997, p. 2). As a result, ‘pro-localism’ actually has undertaken a full circle, and ‘experts’ are once more they centre of development, as Rahnema (1990, as cited in Mohan & Stoke, p. 253) notes, “[We] express this superiority by the very fact that [development experts] recognise and respect the validity of traditional knowledge, whereas nobody else does.” Thus, within ‘pro-localism’ logic a paradox of participation emerges: if we uphold to the primacy of the ‘local’ then we have to reject the assumption that we or ‘experts’ know what best creates space (i.e. high or low levels of participation) for local knowledge to be accessed (Mohan & Stoke, 2000).

One corollary of the pro-local approach to development is that scientific knowledge can be viewed as primarily ‘Western’ or outside knowledge and therefore ‘non-local’ and inappropriate. McKinnon (2006, p. 31) found such a view within a watershed development conference in Thailand, where some attendees automatically equated any past mistakes with ‘Western’ interference in the form of ‘scientific knowledge’. As Cleaver (1999) notes, within development projects there is a “…danger of swinging from one untenable position (‘we know best’) to an equally untenable and damaging one (‘they know best’)” (p. 605). Meanwhile, McKinnon’s case study provided evidence that in practice, foreign development workers can adopt a syncretistic belief, where they see themselves as one “...who works in
partnership, who respects science and local wisdom equally, and brings together both for the sake of a better future” (2006, p. 31).

2.3.3 The Absorption of Participation into Existing Organisational Procedures

A number of authors have noted that the concept of participation has been easily absorbed within development organisations to become a routine technique, a new form of top-down management and control, or a symbolic gesture (Craig & Porter, 1997; Cleaver, 1999; Mosse, 2001, 2004). This suggests that in practice little adherence is given to empowering notions of higher-level participation. As Chambers acknowledged in 1995, “In practice, top-down reality has, though, changed rather little” (p. 33), and then in 2005, “In development studies and practice...there is still a sense of treading water...the structures remain unchanged...institutions reproduce themselves...people are socialized into behaving much the same way as their predecessors” (p. 199).

According to Cleaver (2001), within development activities participation is now primarily used as a management technique, constituting a ‘toolbox’ of participatory procedures and techniques. Rather than these participatory techniques enabling locals to lead and control the development project, they are employed at the discretion of the donor agencies through the donor-contrived project stages (Hussein, 1995; Cleaver, 2001). This has resulted in participation being “…turned away from its radical roots: we now talk of problem-solving through participation rather than problematisation, critical engagement and class” (Cleaver, 2001, p. 53). Thus, a critical tension remains, empowerment-style, higher-level participation is still recognised by the mainstream as desirable and thus publicly exonerated, yet projects remain largely concerned with an efficiency that does not enable such a process to occur.

Craig and Porter (1997) also point to this critical tension, arguing that participatory techniques, like PRA and decentralisation, have in fact morphed into costlier forms of management and control which have not resulted in greater benefits for local people. It is suggested by Craig and Porter (1997) that the failure of participatory techniques is due to the dominance of three integral, related components of current development initiatives: projects, professionals, and organisations, which each reframe local participation accordingly. Firstly, projects are used to map out a time-bound, achievable development process while taking account of complex factors such as geography, community, culture, the political environment,
etc. To mitigate against such ‘inconvenient externalities’ projects have evolved strong formal procedures based on ‘Western’ rationalities, e.g. project goals, objectives, and cause and effect logic (Craig & Porter, 1997, p. 231). However, Craig and Porter (1997) suggest that the ability of local ‘non-Western’ people to express themselves, and consequently participate in such a rational and technical framework, is severely limited. Secondly, Craig and Porter note that development professionals, often with limited local knowledge and field time, are faced with the task of providing orderly project documents for donors, which suggest control and order, from the “morass of local culture and community” (1997, p. 232). As a result of this upward accountability, according to Craig and Porter (1997), the professionals’ work is more than a translation of the local situation; it is a production, with large parts of it achieved without the subjects of development. Lastly, development initiatives generally involve a command chain of different organisations, which include a funding body, a development organisation, and a local partner NGO. Craig and Porter (1997) argue that each of these organisations will reframe any participatory concepts according to its own capacity, priorities, concerns, and organisational culture so that a consistent participatory technique is impossible.

In conclusion, Craig and Porter suggest that, in reality, “local people rarely engage with our ideals and objectives in quite the way we intended,” suggesting that this is because “…they do not fully disengage from the own dream and ideals” (1997, p. 235). These authors allude to an important point: the manner in which stakeholders interface with development assistance is likely to stem from their worldview and existing circumstances.

It has been suggested by Mosse (2001, 2004) that in the current development context participation has departed from its radical notions of empowerment and is now able to conceal development’s traditional hegemony. According to Mosse (2001), while participatory techniques are assumed to redefine and reverse power relationships between local people and development institutions, it is rather the already existent power relationships that will determine the nature of local knowledge produced through participatory techniques. From his observations of a large-scale, joint British-Indian development project in Western India, Mosse (2001) highlights a number ways in which participation can be utilised as a new form of top-down control. Firstly, it is contested that outside agendas can help shape what is termed as ‘local knowledge’. For example, Mosse (2001) found that, to a great extent, project staff owned the process of participation, because during stakeholder workshops they chose the workshops’ topic, and recorded and summarised the information obtained. Furthermore, these participatory workshops were captured by the local community’s social elite, who provided community ‘needs’ based on their perception of what the development organisation wanted or
was capable of delivering. Secondly, it is argued that local peoples’ knowledge, in reality, only becomes ‘local knowledge’ if it will bring about a concrete plan of action. Mosse (2001) found that the project’s local knowledge resulted from a collusion of those with power (project staff and local elites) and relied on a suppression of difference in favour of consensus and action. Furthermore, when this knowledge was reframed as ‘local knowledge’ it enabled the development organisation to legitimise its own agenda and equipped project staff with the power to bargain with the local community on the grounds that the project’s activities were based upon ‘local knowledge’. Thirdly, it appears that project decisions are often made with little reference to locally produced knowledge. Rather, “PRA charts and diagrams provide attractive wall decorations…legitimizing decisions already made – in other words symbolizing good decision-making without influencing it” (Mosse, 2001, p. 23). Mosse (2004) concludes that participatory policies, although appearing ‘good’ and ‘right’, are in reality unimplementable; instead participatory techniques are primarily used to establish relationships between like-minded development organisations and facilitate patron-client relationships between local people and project staff.

### 2.3.4 Uncertainty of Results-Based Evidence

The results-based evidence for the promotion of lower- or higher-levels of local participation remains inconclusive. Authors, including Pretty (1995) and Shepherd (1998), have claimed that higher-levels of local participation are able to increase the sustainability and efficiency of development initiatives. For example, Pretty notes, “There has been an increasing number of comparative studies of development projects showing that ‘participation’ is one of the critical components of success” (1995, p. 1251). Moreover, Chambers (1997, 2005) and Hickey and Mohan (2004) claim that increased amounts of local participation in projects have brought empowerment and transformation to the poor and marginalised. Other authors, though, remain sceptical of these claims (see Cooke & Kothari, 2001). However, because of the dichotomy between policies and practice and the variable interpretations it would appear that a universally ideal level of participation is non-existent, as Mosse notes, “[Participation] is not a provable approach, or methodology” (2001, p. 32).

One highly quoted study is Isham, Narayan, and Pritchett’s (1995) overview of 121 rural water supply projects in 19 countries across Africa, Asia, and South America. This qualitative study found that increased levels of local participation had a direct positive impact on the projects’ outcomes. The majority of projects in this study incorporated community participation as a specific project component, although of these, only in 21% of the projects
was participation deemed to be ‘interactive’ participation. Isham et al. (1995) found that when participation was at these higher-levels, i.e. local people were involved in decision-making during all stages of the project cycle, the best results followed. Moreover, the opposite was also evident; when local people were only involved in information sharing and consultation, project outcomes were much poorer.

Another highly cited source regarding the evidence for participatory projects is Mansuri and Rao’s ‘Community-Based and -Driven Development: A Critical Review’ (2004). This paper, a part of the World Bank’s research group, reviewed a significant number of qualitative and quantitative studies on ‘participatory’ development projects, uncovering noteworthy findings. Firstly, projects that relied on community participation were not always effective in targeting the poor, or did not adequately consider the preferences of the poor within the project. Secondly, not one study had established a causal link between any outcomes and the participatory elements of the project. Thirdly, the evidence suggested that the impact of economic and social heterogeneity on project outcomes is complex and context specific. While economic theorists have suggested that inequality need not constrain collective action, the empirical results suggested the opposite, with some studies showing a U-shaped relationship between inequality and project outcomes. Moreover, while econometric studies showed social fractionalisation tends to inhibit collective activity, there is also qualitative evidence for the opposite. Fourthly, Mansuri and Rao (2004) found that participatory projects are often dominated by the local elite, as they tend to be better educated, have fewer opportunity costs on their time and will therefore have the greatest net benefit from participation. Mansuri and Rao (2004) suggest that this capture can take two forms: ‘pernicious’, where elites appropriate all the benefits, or ‘benevolent’, where elites redistribute benefits to other community members. Fifthly, several qualitative studies exist that show an enabling institutional environment increased the sustainability of project outcomes. Such an environment required government commitment and an accountability of leaders to their community. Sixthly, the evidence suggested that external agents, especially local field workers, strongly influence the project’s success; however, these workers were often poorly trained. Lastly, Mansuri and Rao (2004) found that a naive interpretation of complex contextual concepts like ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ was endemic amongst project implementers and this directly contributed to poor project design and implementation.

Mansuri and Rao concluded, “The success of community-based development is crucially conditioned by local culture and social system” and “…key concepts that underpin
community-based initiatives, such as participation...must be adequately detailed in a context specific manner” (2004, p. 31). It is important to note that Mansuri and Rao (2004) reviewed studies that typically included larger-scale bilateral and multilateral development projects. Furthermore, this review suffers from the ambiguity of participation, as Mansuri and Rao (2004) did not investigate the ‘level’ of participation or its pervasiveness within each project. However, Mansuri and Rao (2004) do provide evidence that suggests higher levels of local participation cannot be assumed as ‘best practice’ or attainable. Rather, it appears that a detailed analysis into how the various stakeholders in development projects interpret participation and the contexts which influence these understandings is warranted. It would seem that one interpretation of participation could never lay claim to being a scientifically proven or provable approach, or method, as it is entirely specific to the project’s aims and the culture and circumstances of the local people.

2.3.5 Pertinent Case Studies

Theories and ideologies of local participation and the robust debate as to its role in development assistance cannot be separated from the practical realities of development field work. Therefore, as Nelson and Wright argue, there is a need for:

[A] critical analysis of ethnographic contexts to see how the discourse and procedures of participation actually work in practice…. The context that needs to be studied is a vertical slice…stretching from people in villages and towns, through in-country agencies and governments to international development agencies.... (1995, p. 1-2)

A significant number of case studies have sought to provide such a snapshot of participation in various development contexts (see Nelson & Wright, 1995; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). However, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine, in detail, all such case studies. Instead, this section will highlight four case studies to show how each project’s unique circumstances influence the way stakeholders interpret participation and engage in participatory projects.


In this case study of a non-formal education development project in Burkina Faso, Michener (1998) found that the concept of participation was understood quite differently amongst the key stakeholders. The large international NGO which funded the project emphasised the
importance of ‘community participation’ through its policy and procedure documents. These documents indicated that ‘community participation’ would occur at all stages of the project cycle, in the form of resource contributions (labour, money, time), i.e. participation as ‘means’. In addition, within policy documents participation was also conceptualised as ‘empowering’ which would occur through the local control of project resources, and increased local understanding and self-reliance. Thus, a dual approach, of both ‘means’ and ‘ends’, to participation was evident; however, Michener notes there was little mention as to the actual practicalities of empowerment in policy and project documents in the Burkina Faso head office.

Michener found that the project’s national field staff’s interpretation of ‘community participation’ contrasted with the organisation’s official discourse. Faced with the realities of project implementation, these stakeholders understood participation as primarily a ‘tool’, whereby “beneficiaries are expected to contribute their resources...[as]...a duty and an obligation so that the beneficiaries do not ‘get something for nothing’” (Michener, 1998, p. 2110). Moreover, these field workers, aware of the rhetoric of empowerment, recognized their project failed to encompass the ‘genuine’ form of participation. Michener suggested higher levels of participation were not embraced by field workers for a number of reasons. Firstly, field workers felt that relying on a community’s ‘felt’ needs alone was unrealistic and it was justifiable for a project’s priorities to come from an outside agency as long as local people agreed to its implementation. Secondly, field workers expressed doubt regarding the capacity of the local people to fully participate because of their genuine dearth of education and skills needed to manage the project according to Western-style development administration and accountability. Thus, field workers were reluctant to hand over the ‘power’ of resources and funds to let the community manage them. Thirdly, the field workers’ conceptualisation of participation allowed them to secure their own hegemony and livelihoods against a situation in which an empowered community might no longer require their services. Furthermore, lower-levels of participation lessened the likelihood of the local community abandoning the project due to ‘too much’ participation in favour of another less demanding project.

Michener found that, “Not surprisingly local people’s perception [of participation] is not shaped by academic rhetoric but rather by past experiences. For them, participation has little to do with self reliance, empowerment or even efficiency” (1998, p. 2116). In the context of Burkina Faso these past experiences included colonialism and paternalistic development projects which demanded labour and financial contributions and whose benefits were captured
by older influential men. As a result, Michener suggested that local community groups adopted participation into a discourse of paternalism and used their time and energy to maintain and manipulate such a relationship. In addition, Michener found that local people carefully weighed up the costs and benefits of participating before investing themselves in a project, meaning participation was seen as the physical and financial ‘payment’ for receiving a development project, rather than a process of empowerment. Michener concluded that the complexities of the field constrain the application of higher, empowering levels of participation, and suggested that development workers and academics alike should adjust participatory frameworks to be more responsive to field-level realities.


This case study involved the Eastern India Rainfed Farming Project (EIRFP), a joint venture between the governments of India and the United Kingdom. Kumar and Corbridge noted that, while the EIRFD was successful in improving farm-based livelihoods, it failed to secure the meaningful participation of the poorest members of its project’s groups. Rather, the project primarily enhanced the social capital of the local village’s elites. Among the EIRFP’s goals were village participation (through participatory groups) in project planning and implementation based on the causal theory that this would enhance local people’s skills and capacities and result in sustainable livelihood improvements. Hence, participation was seen as a ‘tool’ but also an act of empowerment. Furthermore, the EIRP planned for ‘deficit’ or poor households to make up 50% of the participatory village groups, with ‘deficit’ households predetermined by a village household survey.

Kumar and Corbridge noted that the project’s participatory goals and methodology was hampered because it paid insufficient attention to a number of existing social realities. Firstly, a large number of local people (including the social elite and richer farmers), knowing that the project had to be seen to work with the poorest, intentionally misled project field workers by quoting figures for land ownership and food consumption which made even the dominant households look poor. Moreover, the participatory exercises to determine ‘deficit’ households were conducted by non-local, Hindu field workers. These men, a different caste from local people, took the view that ‘tribal villages’ were poor by definition, and were hence unaware that respondents had misled them. The village social elite reported to the authors that they had misrepresented their economic circumstances not just to capture the project’s material benefits but also to ensure their political and social power was not supplanted. Secondly, the project
failed to realise that within the targeted villages, functioning groups existed which managed local resources; their membership was a source of power and therefore occupied by the local elite. Hence, the poorest members of the village did not expect to participate in the EIRP’s project groups and were unsurprised when they were filled by the social elite. Likewise, their experiences within groups meant poorer households did not expect to gain worthwhile benefits from the project and as a result were reluctant to commit their time and energy to group activities. Fourthly, as ‘outsiders’ the local field staff chose to work with the local elite, the already established village hierarchy. Knowing that they would be evaluated on the basis of achieved targets, these field workers felt they needed to work with the more ‘educated’ villages. Apparent among the field workers was the attitude that the poorest villagers were “…only interested in eating and drinking...[and] don’t have any interest in group activities” (2002, p. 84), which meant that only the village elite would ensure an easy and agreeable project management group.

Kumar and Corbridge surmised that the EIRFP could not expect poor people to participate in groups that hold little meaning or purpose for them. Rather, the authors concluded, it is the local context which “…ensures that project interventions will be filtered through existing economic and social arrangements” (2002, p. 85).


Johansen (2003), in her case study of a development project in rural Cambodia, noted that a wide difference in the understandings of participation and empowerment existed amongst the various stakeholders. The expatriate development workers of the implementing international NGO placed a high value on empowering participatory approaches and ideology. In practice, though, participation was treated primarily as a ‘means’, as participation equated to the consultation of local people and their agreement to the staff’s decisions. Meanwhile, Johansen noted that while some attempts to make participation an ‘end’ did exist, there was little understanding across the stakeholders as to what this would involve.

Johansen pointed out that field staff employed a ‘top-down’ practice of empowerment, reminiscent of the teacher-student relationship and had difficulty shifting their roles from that of a teacher to a ‘facilitator’. Underlining this difficulty was the project staff’s belief that local people lacked the sufficient knowledge and skills to take control over the project. Consequently, local people viewed project staff as the possessors of development knowledge,
and hence conceptualised them as their teachers and the leaders of the project, which meant they expressed satisfaction with the project’s consultative practices.

Interestingly, Johansen found that any negative comments about the project made by local people addressed too much, rather than too little, participation. For example, one villager stated, “People are hungry and building roads or participating in meetings does not fill their stomach” (p. 137). Furthermore, Johansen notes that local people who were most sceptical towards the project felt that it had deviated too far from a ‘top-down’ approach and expected ‘gifts’ rather than time-consuming participation. In this regard, the author queried whether culture and history had shaped local perceptions of participation, noting that during the Khmer Rouge era, Cambodians were punished severely for taking initiative and promoting new ideas and rewarded for obeying orders. Johansen concluded that the development organisation’s policy and ideology of ‘power transference’ had not taken place within this project. Instead, imbalances of power, evident through teacher-student type relationships between staff and local people, were prevalent, preventing any ‘genuine’ empowerment.


Marsland’s case study of an anti-malaria rural development project in Tanzania found contradictory interpretations of participation circulated amongst those involved, even though the language used remained the same. The project’s international development experts understood participation as ‘empowerment’, meaning local people would be involved in the decision making process. However, their Tanzanian counterparts understood participation, and the Tanzanian word which it was translated into, to mean an ‘obligation’ of the local people to contribute to the development of the nation. This Tanzanian understanding is rooted in the nation’s history of socialism, where the word for ‘participation’ (kujitegemea) has an ideological association, built of the former socialist leader Joseph Nyerere’s concept of self-reliance. This concept of self-reliance was manifested in Tanzanian ‘self-help’ projects of the 1950s and 1960s whereby citizens were obligated to contribute labour and resources in community efforts to ‘build the nation’. In addition, recent government budget cuts had meant local communities were once again treated as a useful resource of labour and cash, again under the rhetoric of ‘participation’ (kujitegemea). Meanwhile, Marsland found that because foreign and Tanzanian development workers did not work closely together, these two disparate interpretations of ‘participation’ were able to co-exist and operate within the project without overt difficulty.
Marsland also discovered that in the project, issues inherent to the local context and local government structures proved significant barriers to achieving higher levels of participation. For example, the local government, feeling threatened by the empowerment of the project’s local steering committee, accused it of being a political party, and made moves to take control of the project and its resources. Furthermore, Marsland found that notions of local empowerment ran contrary to the ‘elite mentality’ of local officials, possibly inherited from the colonial past, who saw the rural populace as “primitive, lacking initiative, corrupt, promiscuous, uneducated and therefore a social problem that must be carried by the elites’ weary shoulders” (2006, p. 76). This attitude was also adopted by the project steering committee (although itself made up of local rural people), because, as someone suggested to Marsland, “[This is] the nature of leaders; they like to talk about the community as if they are ‘mbumbumbu’ (slow-witted)” (2006, p. 77).

Marsland concluded that “There is no blank slate on which participation can be drawn. Instead, the meanings attributed to participation by development agencies are assimilated into an existing discourse” (2006, p. 77). Within this case study, the existing discourse, grounded in socialist history and community power imbalances, proved to be incompatible with participation equating to local decision-making and empowerment.

Case Study Conclusions
The above case studies provide evidence that the participation of local people within rural development projects is, in fact, an open-ended concept, with the various stakeholder interpretations able to co-exist in the same project. Furthermore, it appears that ideological notions of empowering participation do not readily transform into the practical realities of project life. Rather, notions of participation are reframed by the actors involved in projects according to a vast array of influences which include culture (individual, community, and organisational), the local context, social/economic/political circumstances, power imbalances, and past experiences.
2.4 Overview of Mongolia

This section will provide a basic overview of Mongolia and thus set the background for the research. The topic of ‘Mongolia’ is indeed broad and has received growing attention within literary, tourism, and development circles since the country opened its borders and archives after the democratic revolution in 1991. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into a deep investigation of all things Mongolian. Instead, this section will briefly describe pertinent aspects of Mongolia’s history, current context, and culture, and then conclude with a review of recent case studies that have dealt with issues of participation in Mongolian rural development projects.

2.4.1 Historical Overview

Early History

Although Mongolian history is synonymous with the name Chinggis Khan\(^2\), the term *mon-gu*, which means ‘those same barbarians’, first appeared in Chinese historical writings in the first century A.D. (Baabar, 1999). These people groups were located to the north of China and carved out an existence on the climatically perilous central Asian steppes and based their livelihoods on semi-nomadic herding practices (Man, 2004). Each of these households produced goods identical to its neighbours, limiting the internal commodity exchange, resulting in periodic raiding of the Chinese (Baabar, 1999). In response to such raids by the Hunnu Empire, the Chinese built the ‘Great Wall’ in the fourth and fifth centuries A.D., protecting its sedentary, agricultural-based societies (Baabar, 1999). This pattern of semi-nomadic people groups consolidating into an empire and then raiding or trading with southern societies was repeated for the following thousand years.

By the middle of the twelfth century Mongolian tribes were surrounded by large encroaching empires of the Jin dynasty, Northern and Southern Song dynasties, and Tangut Khanate (Baabar, 1999). *Chinggis Khan*, born in 1162, united these tribes to repel these empires and establish the Great Mongol Empire in 1206 (Altangerel, 2001). Through the continued conquest of its more sedentary neighbouring nations, the Great Mongol Empire extended its borders from Korea to Iran and from the Angara river in Siberia to the Great Wall of China by the time of *Chinggis’s* death in 1227 (Baabar, 1999). Moreover, by the end of the 13th century, *Chinggis’s* descendents had extended Mongolia’s borders even further to stretch from the

\(^2\) A number of transliterations are used for Mongolia’s most famous ruler, perhaps the most frequent being ‘Genghis Khan’; however, ‘Chinggis Khan’ bears the closest resemblance to its Mongolian root ‘Чингис Хан’.
Black Sea to the Korean Peninsula, incorporating China, East Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia, and large portions of Russia and Eastern Europe to become the largest continuous land empire in history (Altangerel, 2001; Baabar, 1999). However, over the successive two centuries the empire slowly disintegrated due to infighting amongst its ruling Khans (Chinggis’s descendents), the difficulties of sustaining peace in such a large territory, and the steady resistance of the local populace (Baabar, 1999). The great Ilkhanate of the Middle East lasted until the 1330s, the Golden Horde of Russia dissolved around the 1450, while, in 1368, with the rise to power of the Ming dynasty, its Mongolian rulers3 were expelled from China and fled north to the land of their ancestors (Altangerel, 2001; Man, 2004). What followed in Mongolia were three centuries of internal feuding and power struggles amongst its tribal leaders and the division of land into various princedoms (Altangerel, 2001).

In the early 17th century, the Manchu of Northwest China established the Qing dynasty of China and began to assimilate the Mongol princedoms into its empire to rule greater Mongolia by 1691 (Baabar, 1999). The Manchu rulers employed a number of strategies in order to keep the Mongol people weak and disjointed, including the introduction of Tibetan Buddhism4, a series of oppressive laws, heavy taxes, and trade restrictions that favoured Manchu merchants and bankers, and the bestowing of competing ‘titles’ and nobilities to the various Mongol princedoms which resulted in a strict hierarchy of social classes (Baabar, 1999; Altangerel, 2001). As a result, according to Altangerel (2001), “By the end of the nineteenth century, Mongolia was thoroughly isolated, backward, malnourished, and desperate for independence – for freedom from the Manchu and from the feudalistic social order” (p. 29).

Turn of the 20th Century

Without knowledge of the tumultuous events of last century in Mongolia, it would be difficult to understand contemporary Mongolian society and the goals and dreams of Mongolians today. (Borjigid Sanduin Idshinnorov, Director of the National Museum of Mongolian History, in Sabloff, 2001, p. xi)

In the early 20th century the Manchu Empress, Dowager Tzu-Hsi, adopted a ‘New Government Policy’ of reforms and ‘Westernised’ laws, which aimed to amalgamate

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3 The Yuan dynasty in China was established by Khublai Khan, Chinggis’s grandson.
4 According to Kemp (2000) and Bumaa (2001), in the late Manchu period a religious hierarchy of 100,000 Buddhist lamas existed (almost half the adult male population) with approximately one-third of them living in around 700 temples across Mongolia.
Mongolia as a province of China (Baabar, 1999). In opposition to such policies, all levels of Mongolian society began to rebel against Manchu rule. This culminated in a proclamation of Mongolian Independence in December 1911, with Mongolia’s highest lama, the Bogd Khan, appointed as the country’s state and religious leader. Over the next ten years, with revolutions in both China and Russia, and World War I, Mongolia was thrust into a state of turmoil, never able to totally free itself from foreign (Chinese or Russian) occupation and control or gain recognition as an independent nation from the international community.

In 1921 representatives from the Mongolian People’s Party, a Mongolian resistance movement, held a secret meeting with the newly established Soviet ‘Comintern’ (Bumaa, 2001). At this meeting, these Mongolians requested and were granted support from the Bolsheviks in their fight for independence and the establishment of a new government. In July 1921, the Mongolia-Bolshevik army liberated Mongolia from all foreign military and the revolutionaries established a limited monarchy under the Bogd Khan with Bodoo named the first prime minister. Thus, Mongolia, with assistance from the Russian Bolsheviks, was able to once again declare its independence on September 14th, 1921 (Baabar, 1999).

Communism – A Soviet Satellite

This new Communist government strove to bring democratic reform and modernisation to the country by inviting all levels of society to participate in the new government and abolishing the ranks and titles of all princes and nobleman and rescinding their rights to own serfs (Baabar, 1999; Bumaa, 2001). Meanwhile, with Bolshevik troops and Soviet advisors permanently stationed in-country, the Soviet Comintern gradually began to enforce communist ideology on the Mongolian government, and through them, the general populace (Bumaa, 2001, p.39). These Soviet advisors, following Marxist-Lenin teachings, urged the Mongolian government “to leap over the capitalist stage [of cultural evolution], going directly from feudalism to communism” (Bumaa, 2001, p.39). When the Mongolian leaders voiced their disagreement with or questioned this policy a series of early political purges resulted (Baabar, 1999). After the death of the Bogd Khan, the government, under guidance from the Soviet Union, began to reorganise the country into a Socialist republic. Following its first national assembly in 1924 Mongolia become officially known as the ‘Mongolian People’s Republic’ (MPR) instituting the ‘Mongolian People’s Revolutionary Party’ (MPRP) as the sole ruling party. Furthermore, in 1926 the MPR defined its “…fundamental economic goal as

5 The Comintern was the Communist party’s political organisation responsible for the worldwide spread of communism.
the formation of national and co-operatively owned property, the rapid liberation of the country from the dominant influence of foreign capital, the restriction of capitalist elements, and the improvements of the livelihood of the poor and middle *arat* masses” (Sanders, 1987, p. 20); with this creed Communism had been born in Mongolia.

For almost the next 70 years the MPR was to become a satellite state of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) with its history and economic and social policies closely resembling that of its patron, the Soviet Union (Gilberg & Svantesson, 1996). Baabar (1999) suggests that the leaders of the MPR were virtual ‘puppets’, receiving clear directives from Moscow, with autonomous leadership discouraged and punishable by demotion, exile, or even death. During this period Mongolia experienced a rapid, complex transformation achieved through substantial economic (capital and technical assistance, and subsidised electricity and petroleum), military, and governance ‘assistance’ from the USSR. The primary goals of Soviet-style development were the urbanisation of the populace, the industrialisation of the economy, and the collectivisation of the herders, all to be achieved with central planning (Rossabi, 2005). Urban dwelling increased from 21.6 percent of the populace in 1956 to 51.8 percent in 1986 as cities (*aimag* centres) and villages (*sums*) were established in the Mongolian countryside to become centres for industry, governance, and social services (hospitals, schools, theatres, etc.) (Sanders, 1987). Industrialisation progressed alongside urbanisation, with large numbers of factories (primarily producing livestock-based products) and mines (coal, copper, gold, molybdenum, and fluorspar) established to accommodate the growing numbers of the ‘working class’ (Sanders, 1987; Rossabi, 2005). Private enterprise was banned and hence the entire ‘working class’ was involved in the state-operated goods and services sector. The collectivisation of Mongolia’s substantial livestock resources, having failed in earlier attempts, was finally enforced in 1959. This meant herders herded state-owned livestock in collectives called *negdels* and were required to meet state-set production targets of meat, wool, and milk in return for a salary (Goldstein & Beall, 1994).

It has been noted that the Communist era brought with it both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ impacts on Mongolia (Bumaa, 2001; Rossabi, 2005). Supported by the USSR, Mongolia increasingly modernised its infrastructure. The capital, Ulaanbaatar was transformed from an

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6 *Arat* means ‘commoners’ and represents ‘the working class’ of socialist theory (Sanders, 1987).
7 It is estimated that during this period Mongolia received approximately 30 percent of its budget from the USSR (Sneath, 2002).
8 During the Communist period Mongolia had four distinct classes: herders, workers, intelligentsia, and political leaders (Sanders, 1987).
isolated backwater to a modern city of new factories, hospitals, schools, offices, housing complexes, asphalt roads, central heating systems, sanitation and water supplies, public transport, and cultural and sporting centres (Bumaa, 2001). Meanwhile, aimag centres and to a lesser degree sums were created with many of these amenities which enabled countryside families access to the universal public health, education, and social welfare services (including generous pensions) provided by the state (Goldstein & Beall, 1994). Moreover, progress in human development indicators was made; for example, from 1960 to 1990, life expectancy at birth increased from 47 to 63 years, and the literacy rate rose to 97 percent, leading authors to suggest that extreme poverty was almost non-existent during the Communist era (Mearns, 2004a; Rossabi, 2005). However, such ‘progress’ came at a significant human cost as, in a reflection of Soviet history, Mongolians endured a one-party authoritarian rule, increasing state interference in their lives and subsequent loss of freedoms, and gross human rights violations (Baabar, 1999; Bumaa, 2001). The human costs of Communism occurred not only on a grand scale, the MPRP purging over 36,000 people in order to eliminate any perceived opposition, but also at an everyday level as the state confiscated private property, restricted movement, enforced a strict obeisance to Marxist-Leninist teachings, and discouraged Mongolian culture, traditions, and nationalism (Baabar, 1999; Bumaa, 2001).

Post-Communism

Following policies of ‘perestroika’ and ‘glasnost’ and the subsequent breakdown of the USSR, Mongolia underwent a peaceful democratic revolution in 1990. Shortly after, the one-party system was abolished and open democratic elections were held in which the MPRP received 60 percent of the vote and the new political parties 40 percent (Rossabi, 2005). The freshly elected government ratified a new Mongolian National Constitution on January 25th 1992, guaranteeing the freedom of speech, press, assembly and movement, a democratically elected political system, the protection of human and economic rights, and the separation of religion and state (Rossabi, 2005).

The new Mongolian government aimed for a rapid transition from a centrally planned to a free-market economy. The transition, termed ‘shock therapy’, entailed the privatisation of state assets, the elimination of state subsidies and trade tariffs, the liberalisation of prices, and a down-sizing of the government and its social services (Rossabi, 2005). According to Rossabi (2005), such policies were promoted by the prominent multilateral development agencies, like the World Bank, IMF, and ADB, and their consultants. These agencies
contributed US $300 million annually to the Mongolian economy (equivalent to 30 percent of its GDP) which further encouraged the government to hold to these reforms. However, combined with the withdrawal of the Soviet Union’s aid, trade, and economic management these ‘shock therapy’ policies saw Mongolia plunge into an economic and social crisis through the 1990s (Griffin, 1995), leading Sneath to comment in 2000:

[These reforms] proved to be bitterly disappointing for most Mongolians, who saw a collapse in their living standards, declining public services and rising levels of unemployment and crime….The real transition that Mongolia has experienced has been from a middle-income to a poor country, as if the process of development has been put into reverse. (2000, p. 191 & 196)

While the downward economic spiral began to ease around the turn of the 21st century, Mongolia, particularly the rural regions, continued to be affected by rising unemployment, inflation, poverty, corruption, and shrinking social services. This has led authors to criticise Mongolia’s development pathway on the grounds that development initiatives ignored the local culture and context and focused on Western-style infrastructure and free-market programmes at the expense of poverty alleviation strategies (Campi, 1996; Sneath, 2000; Rossabi, 2005). Nevertheless, as Mongolia moves further into the new millennium, progress in its macro-economic and development indicators has emerged, and it is fast gaining a reputation as a ‘model’ democracy amongst the other ‘postsocialist’ or ‘transitional’ nations (Sabloff, 2001; Rossabi, 2005).

2.4.2 Current Context

Basic Facts and Figures

Mongolia is a landlocked country of 2.9 million people in Northern Asia, bordering the People’s Republic of China to the south and Russia to the north (see Figure: 1). Mongolia is virtually the size of Western Europe and is one of the least densely populated countries in the world, with a land area of 1,564,116 km² (17th largest in the world), and an average population density of 1.0 persons/km when discounting the capital city (Mearns, 2004a; CIA, n.d.). The low population density is linked to Mongolia’s geographical and climatic extremes: the land composes vast semi-desert and desert plains, which includes the Gobi desert in the

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9 Mongolia is also referred to as ‘Outer Mongolia’, with ‘Inner Mongolia’ designating the Mongol autonomous region of the People’s Republic of China. In this thesis the term ‘Mongolia’ refers to ‘Outer Mongolia’.
10 The population has increased four-fold since 1924 when it contained 542,500 Mongolians, 100,000 Chinese, and 5,000 Russians (Gilberg & Svantesson, 1996).
south/central regions, high mountain ranges, and grassy steppes, while the climate is characterised by lengthy cold winters (January’s average temperature is -20°C), short summers, and low precipitation (Batima, 2006). Mongolia is relatively ethnically homogenous with ethnic Mongols (the majority Khlalk Mongols) making up 94.9 percent, Kazakh 5 percent (primarily in the western corner of the country), and Chinese and Russians 0.1 percent of the populace (CIA, n.d.).

**Figure 1: Location of Mongolia**

(From: Mongolia Travel Guide, n.d.)

**Political/Administrative Structure**

Mongolia has held multi-party democratic elections since its cessation from the Soviet Union in 1991, with little evidence of election fraud or tampering (Rossabi, 2005). The government system is unicameral with power shared between the president, who has regulatory powers, the parliament, which has legislative powers, and the Supreme Court (Enkhbat & Odgaard, 1996). As part of its transformation to a democratic, free-market country, the government has concentrated on trying to decentralise state services, like health and education, as well as decision-making powers (Mearns, 2004b). This decentralisation process has resulted in three levels of sub-national administration consisting of *aimags*, *sums*, and *bags* (see Figure: 2) (Mearns, 2004b; Yembuu & Munkh-Erdene, 2005). Firstly, Mongolia is divided into 22 major administrative units consisting of 21 *aimags* (provinces) and the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. *Aimag* populations have on average 75,000 people, but vary from 12,500 to 122,000, while
Ulaanbaatar is rapidly expanding to hold approximately one million inhabitants (UN, n.d.). These aimags are comprised of a number of sums (rural districts) which hold around 5,000 people each and an aimag (provincial) ‘capital’ or ‘centre’ which has around 25,000 people. Sums in turn consist of bags (rural sub-districts) which have less than 1,000 members, the majority of whom are nomadic herders. At each of these administrative levels there is an elected assembly or ‘khural’ which is headed by a Khural-elected governor. Importantly, this administrative structure is closely aligned with development in Mongolia, with socio-economic indicators of development decreasing down this administrative chain (see Figure: 2) (UNDP, 2007).

**Figure 2: Political/Administrative Structure and local Context of Mongolia**

**Human Development**

The UNDP Mongolia’s 2007 ‘Mongolian Human Development Report’ provides a useful summary of the current socio-economic context in Mongolia. According to the UNDP, “Mongolia is moving into a new era in its development” (2007, p. 13), evidenced by its Human Development Index (HDI) reaching its highest level yet at 0.700, placing Mongolia 114th out of 177 countries. The HDI measures education, health, and income and in the last seven years each of these three components has significantly increased in Mongolia, with the inter-aimag variances decreasing. Moreover, due to increased revenues from mining Mongolia’s national economic figures have also risen: economic growth averaged 8.7% from
2003 onwards, government budget revenues and expenditure increased by 30% over the same period, and income per capita rose from US $810 in 2005 to $1,290 in 2007 (UNDP, 2007; World Bank, n.d.). Based on these figures Mongolia is currently classified by the World Bank as a lower-middle income country and as such still receives official development assistance of around USD $200 million annually (World Bank, n.d.).

However, despite these development gains poverty remains entrenched in Mongolian society. According to the UNDP (2007), over 32 percent of the population are classified as living below the poverty line, which increases to 37 percent in the rural sector. Meanwhile, several key Millennium Development Goal (MDG) indicators, like the primary school completion rate, are regressing and the key MDG target of a 50 percent reduction in poverty appears unachievable. Thus, UNDP Mongolia (2007) noted that, while economic growth has occurred, the benefits have gone to those already living well in Mongolia society. This has resulted in a widening of the inequalities between rich and poor, evidenced by Mongolia’s Gini coefficient\textsuperscript{11} increasing from 0.329 in 2002/3 to 0.380 in 2006. A number of factors contributing to the increasing rural poverty were indicated by the UNDP report. Firstly, herders often have a small number of livestock, meaning, alongside ecological constraints, their need to consume animals makes it difficult to increase herd size. Secondly, rural children (especially boys) are increasingly dropping out of school in order to earn an income for the family, which is at the expense of their future employability and earning capacity. Thirdly, job creation in rural areas has slowed in recent years, while the majority of jobs are low-paying (especially for females) so that households with full-time wage earners are still living below the poverty line.

**Dominant Influences in the Rural Society**

Mongolia’s rural society has traditionally been dominated by livestock herding, although in recent times mining has also begun to exert significant influence. Livestock herding is not only the principle livelihood strategy for rural Mongolians (engaging half of Mongolia’s population), it also is the epicentre of Mongolia culture from which many of its traditions, values, and behaviours have emerged (Baabar, 1999; Batima, 2006). Mongolian herders are ‘transhumant’, grazing distinct areas of pasture-land each season, with three to four semi-permanent camping areas and a permanent kin dwelling in a nearby sum (Mearns, 2004a). Herds comprise any number of horses, yaks, sheep, goats, and cows depending on the

\textsuperscript{11} The Gini coefficient is a common development measurement of the gap between a nation’s rich and poor citizens with a higher number indicating increased inequalities (see Perkins, Radelet & Lindauer, 2006).
geography and climate and fill the majority of consumption needs for rural families (Goldstein & Beall, 2004). Post democratic transition, because of widespread unemployment, the number of herders swelled; however, the place of herding as rural Mongolia’s backbone is threatened by overgrazing, repeated climatic hazards (drought and zuud\(^{12}\)), small herd sizes, and a loss of traditional practices (Humphrey & Sneath, 1999; Mearns, 2004a).

Since the 1990s both the informal and formal mining sectors have expanded rapidly in Mongolia. While large-scale formal mining accounted for 17 percent of Mongolia’s GDP and 58% of its export earnings in 2008 and employs 12,000 people, informal or artisanal mining is the more dominant feature in the rural sector engaging up to 100,000 people (World Bank, 2006). These artisanal mines are concentrated at alluvial and hard rock gold deposits typically near current or past commercial operations (Upton, 2008b). Many of these artisanal miners are herders forced into the industry because of the recent natural disasters which led to substantial livestock losses. Thus, according to Upton (2008b) artisanal mining has become an important ‘safety net’ for impoverished rural people. Nevertheless, informal mining has many adverse effects on its participants’ health and safety as well as negative impacts on the residing herder population of a loss of access to, and the pollution of, pasture and water resources (Upton, 2008b).

### 2.4.3 Mongolian Culture

Mongolian culture, like other cultures throughout the world, is a broad, complex, dynamic phenomenon, functioning as “…the rules for the game of life” (McDaniel, Samovar & Porter, 2006, p.10). The literature on Mongolian culture has predominantly described its more visible or obvious manifestations, such as Mongolia’s cultural activities (traditions and customs, art, gender roles) and cultural institutions (educational, religious, political, and economic systems) (Jagchid & Hyer, 1979; Sabloff, 2001; Dodd, 2006). However, it is beyond the scope of this literature review to provide a wide overview of these cultural components. Meanwhile, literature on the more invisible layer of Mongolian culture, i.e. “the shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group of people which result in characteristic behaviours,” (Storti, 1999, p.5) remains scarce. This means Mongolian culture has not been described in light of cultural concepts, like collectivism/individualism, locus of control, polychronic/monochronic time orientations, universalism/particularism, etc. (Hofstede, 1991; Dodd, 1998). This inner

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\(^{12}\)Zuud or ˈzuːd ˈ which translates as ‘harsh winter’ is a winter in which ice, cold, and poor pasture combines to bring widespread livestock deaths.
layer of culture will be explored in part through this research, with two pertinent components, ‘centralised structures of authority’ and ‘societal organisation’, described in the following sections.

2.4.3.1 Centralised Structures of Authority

Literature suggests that through its history, Mongolian society has been dominated by an authoritarian, hierarchical polity; hence the concept that the power to lead resides in a central structure or person(s) is a normative cultural value (Campi, 1996; Sneath, 1999, 2002). Sneath (2002) suggests that this leadership structure arose from Mongolia’s historic pastoral economy where the regulated and controlled access to common resources (pasture land and water) was imperative for the survival of livestock, and hence society. This authoritarian rule continued into the Communist era, as Campi notes: “Political loyalty to a patron or leader in traditional Mongolian society was smoothly transferable to the communist era’s authoritarian relationships [as] concepts such as popular sovereignty, political freedom and majority rule never had a place in Mongolia in the past” (1996, p. 93). Meanwhile, according to Sneath (1999) these concepts of rule and leadership still permeate rural societies in postsocialist Mongolia today, perhaps underpinned by Mongolia’s traditional belief system of shamanism (tengerism) where “…the sky [tenger] is the power above all powers…[that] allows humans and animals to live…[and] sets out the destiny of all living beings” (Humphrey, 1996, p. 142). As such, leadership is often conceptualised as having been ordained by higher powers (Man, 2004). A brief chronological overview will follow illustrating why and how authoritarian structures are a normative part of contemporary Mongolia society.

The Rule of Chinggis Khan

During the reign of Chinggis Khan and his descendents, the independent tribes of the Mongolia steppe were unified into one nation under a centralised governance structure (Jagchid & Hyer, 1979). While Chinggis held absolute authority over all Mongolians (Man, 2004), the nation was further divided into one hundred domains, each ruled by a hereditary lord (Bold, 2001). These domains were military-administrative units called ‘мянгаад’ (myangad) or ‘thousand’, as a nominal one thousand soldiers could be levied from them (Sneath, 2002). Overall governance belonged to Chinggis and his close advisors who assigned grazing land and water resources to each myangad, which was subsequently apportioned and regulated by each lord. In addition, property ownership was also hierarchically structured, as Giovanni Carpini, a Christian monk in the Mongolia court, reported, “All things are in the hands of the Emperor to such an extent that no one dare says this is mine or his…In short
whatever the chief’s desire…they receive from their subjects’ property” (Sneath, 2002, p. 198) Thus, Sneath contests that as early as the thirteenth century, land, livestock, and common people were considered socio-political and economic entities which came under the jurisdiction of higher ruling bodies (2002, p.198).

**Manchu Dynasty**

During the time of Manchu rule, authors have suggested that Mongolia entered into a ‘feudalistic’ period (Jagchid & Hyer, 1979; Sneath, 2002). The Manchu introduced a hierarchical administrative structure known as the ‘banner’ system or hoshuu. These banners were founded upon the myangad system and ruled by a Mongolian hereditary prince, with Buddhist monasteries also given similar rights over a district. The banner princes and Buddhist lamas and their various officials became the ruling class, who controlled and regulated the everyday usage of Mongolia’s pastureland. According to Sneath, “The leader’s role was highly important in these institutions and, like, other ideas of social status, was generally regarded as legitimate by the ordinary people: it was seen as ordained in the nature of things (by divine incarnation, by inheritance, etc.)” (1999, p.70). Subservient to the ruling class were different levels of serfs: the monastery serfs (shavinar) and prince serfs (hamjilaga) herded the ruling classes’ livestock and could be sold, while the ard were nomads subject to the state, and paid taxes to the ruling classes in the form of livestock, corvée labour, and military service (Sneath, 1999, 2002; Altangerel, 2001). Within this banner system the officials coordinated livestock movements, while the herder households were responsible for the day-to-day herding activities (Sneath, 2002). Again therefore, the political, economic, and, to an extent, social spheres of the general populace were controlled by higher powers.

**Communist Era**

In the ‘Communist’ or ‘Socialist’ era, centralised authority was foundational to the political, economic, and social structure of the nation, an ever-present reality in the daily lives of Mongolian citizens. Therefore, notions of power and authority required only a limited ideological shifting from the previous centuries; as Sneath states, “The ‘feudal’ social order was abolished, but was replaced by another ‘unitarian’ socio-political order – state socialism” (2002, p. 200).

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13 Bold (2001) contests whether the term ‘feudalistic’ can be applied to Mongolia’s nomadic pastoral economy of the Manchu period, arguing that the term was popularised to support Marxist-Lenin ideology and propaganda on the ‘theory of socio-economic formation’, i.e. that Mongolia had moved from a primitive society to slavery to feudalism, but would then ‘leap frog’ over capitalism to socialism/communism.
As a cornerstone of Communist ideology, Mongolia’s livestock were forcibly collectivised in the 1950s (Bumaa, 2001). These collectives (negdels) brought top-down, regulation to the rural economy and according to Sneath, were simply updated versions of the “centralized, commandist politico-economic units” of earlier times (2002, p. 201). Collectives were based upon banner divisions of the Manchu era, and herders were further divided into sub-sections known as the heseg, bag, brigade, and suur. Under this system, pasture land and water usage, herd composition, fodder supplies, and seasonal movements were all coordinated and controlled by negdel management structures and government officials, and the day-to-day herder activities were controlled by the leaders of groups such as the suur and brigade (Goldstein & Beall, 1994). Meanwhile, other industries, like state factories and farms, were conducted through similar centrally-orientated structures (Bumaa, 2001).

Intrinsic to the Communism in Mongolia was the development of a ‘command economy’ or ‘central planning’ economic system (Sanders, 1987). In a command economy, the life-cycle and activity of firms (producers of goods and services), and the coordination between them are governed by the state through administrative means (Grossman, 1987). The result in Mongolia was a complete absence of formal private enterprises or businesses; instead the state determined the amount and type of products and services and the wage rate. To execute this required top-down management spreading out from the central planning committee, as Grossman notes, “[A command economy] requires formal centralized, administrative hierarchy staffed by a bureaucracy…[which] needs to be embedded in (at least) an authoritarian, highly centralised polity” (1987, p. 494).

From an ideological standing, Communism in Mongolia claimed to have a moral authority, advocating the equality of society, in which property was held in common, and concentrations of private wealth opposed (Nove, 1987; Bumaa, 2001). However, this leads to a moral paradox as Nove comments, “A regime devoted to equality in its literal sense would have to be authoritarian, ready to crush inequalities whenever they reasserted themselves, as they inevitably and constantly would” (1987, p. 406). Authoritarian rule to bring about equality was common in Mongolia, where private property and wealth were forcibly confiscated, and mass purges eradicated those whom the state judged were a risk to ‘the common good’ (Bumaa, 2001; Baabar, 1999).
While in the economic literature Mongolia is often labelled a ‘transition’ nation, anthropologists describe former communist states like Mongolia as ‘postsocialist’ because decades of communism have left long-lasting and deeply rooted effects upon these societies and their citizens (Hann, 2002). The categorisation of nations as ‘postsocialist’ rests upon two relevant assumptions. Firstly, people live in complex social and cultural worlds (Lampland, 2002); therefore, there can never be a sudden emptying out of social phenomena to be replaced rapidly and completely by a new way of life (Humphrey, 2002). Secondly, Socialism or Communism cannot be reduced and conceptualised as simply a series of economic principles; rather, “Actually existing socialism was a deeply pervasive phenomenon, existing not only as practices but also as public and covert ideologies and contestations” (Humphrey, p. 12). Thus, elements of the Communist era, such as authoritarian and centralised leadership, state provision, etc., will still have a wide influence on contemporary Mongolian society and culture.

As a transition economy, the government structure in Mongolia has undergone a series of reforms aimed at ‘democratic decentralisation’; however, according to Mearns (2004a), in rural regions, top-down governance still remains. The decentralisation process involved the transfer of powers from central state to local non-state bodies and efforts to increase the accountability of public institutions. However, Mearns (2004a) notes that, although decentralisation features strongly in government policy and rhetoric, in practise it has been messy and far from complete with a hierarchical system of governance still existing. This is evidenced by the absence of self-governing, fiscally autonomous authorities at the aimag and sum level. Instead, the decision-making ability of these authorities is curtailed by strict government mandates and unpredictable and inequitable budget revenues derived from the central government rather than the local region. As a result, local authorities have limited downward accountability to their constituents, replaced instead by upward accountability to the central government. Moreover, both Mearns (2004a) and Sneath (1999) report that the key actors at the aimag and sum level are the all-powerful governors. This is because although locally elected assemblies exist (the khural), they act as a forum for the aimag and sum governors to consult rather than for majority consensus decision-making (Mearns, 2004). Mearns (2004a) further notes that an ambiguous land law has meant that the sum administration is currently the principle actor with regard to rural land management.
According to authors, such as Sneath (1999), one of the principle features of contemporary Mongolian culture is strong, visible, and structured leadership. While Sneath (1999) suggests that indigenous ideas on order and power conceptualise group leadership as necessary and the ‘natural’ way to do things, other pragmatic reasons are also evident. Sneath (1999) notes that, with a decline in the state provision of goods and services, powerful ‘brokers’ are needed to connect rural communities to the outside world. Thus, leaders in Mongolia are selected based upon their power or ability to provide for their communities or groups. In pre-Communist times this power resided with chiefs or nobles who were typically male, older, and wealthy, as well as with shamans and monks (Humphrey, 1996; Pederson, n.d.); in the Communist period however, it was based upon one’s position within the party or administrative system (Sneath, 1999). In recent times, though, this power resides with those who have access to vital resources, such as current government officials, former officials within Communism, members of elite families, or wealthy businessmen or herdsmen (Sneath, 1999; Rossabi, 2005). As a result, leaders are typically selected because their power or connections allow them to provide for others, rather than because of their ability to govern democratically.

2.4.3.2 Social Organisation

Herders – ‘Khot Ail’

A number of authors have suggested that the most common form of social organisation amongst Mongolian herders is the ‘хөт айл’ (khot ail) (Odgaard, 1996; Bold, 2001; Upton, 2008). The khot ail is a temporary group of between two to eight herder households, typically made up of relatives and friends that camp together and join their labour forces (Odgaard, 1996; Sneath, 1999). The khot ail came to prominence during the Manchu Period and Bold suggests it “…has been the main and sole-effective socio-economic institution since the 1850s” (2001, p. 68). The khot ail, however, disappeared under the collectivist system of the 1950s to 1980s and was replaced by the suur. The suur was the smallest work-unit unit within the negdel and comprised one to four households. In contrast to the khot ail, the suur was a stable, fixed group of unrelated households, which was formed and controlled by an outside agent – the negdel administration (Upton, 2008). Following, the collapse of the negdels and the early rural cooperatives (khorshoo and kompan) and the subsequent influx of herdsmen, the khot ail once again emerged in the 1990s as the prominent social organisation within herder society (Odgaard, 1996).

14 The separate terms ‘хөм’ (khot), and ‘айл’ (ail) are also used interchangeably with khot ail within the literature. See Bold (2001) for a historical survey of their differing usages.
The *khot ail* is formed for primarily economic reasons, rather than as a stable social structure, i.e. “It reflects social organisation, rather than providing the basis for it” (Odgaard, p. 131). This is because the main function of the *khot ail* is to pool labour in activities such as making hay, cutting wool and hair, watching animals, moving, etc., which creates economies of scale that result in increased efficiency. Odgaard notes, “Only labour is pooled, never animals and other assets” (p. 130). In addition, the *khot ail* is both temporary (herders come together for a limited time for seasonal tasks), and also flexible (different herders group together from year to year). As a result, the majority of herder household decisions are made independently of the other *khot ail* members.

Although it may contain both rich and poor herders, the *khot ail* is not a mechanism for poverty alleviation (Odgaard, 1996). The *khot ail* does to a small extent help its poorer members by aiding the labour deficient, providing loans of livestock and food, and giving small gifts (Odgaard, 1996). However, while labour and herds may temporarily be joined, the produce from each household’s herd is not redistributed amongst the group, with material exchanges between households beyond that of labour kept to a minimum. Meanwhile, Mearns (2004b) and Odgaard (1996) note that within the *khot ail* rich and poor herders often enter into patron-client relations which act to keep the status-quo of power and wealth imbalances within the group. Moreover, according to Odgaard (1996), poverty alleviation has more typically been relegated to higher-level institutions, such as princes and monasteries in pre-communist times, and more recently the state administration.

**Wider Mongolia – Social Relations of Obligation**

The anthropologist David Sneath calls attention to everyday networks of relationship in Mongolia, suggesting, “The most important conceptual scheme is that of general relatedness. Rather than bounded units and groups, kith and kin (friends and relatives) form a network” (1999, p. 139). Thus, other common social constructs, such as the *khot ail*, residential family groups, and households are not mutually exclusive but merge to form an individual’s network of relationships. Sneath (1999) uses the term ‘social relations of obligation’ to describe the function of this network, as they consist of personal relationships through which assistance is definitely expected to flow. Thus, the relationships within this network are characterised by the giving of and requests for goods and services.

According to Sneath (1999), these networks or ‘social relations of obligation’ spread out from the individual, are flexible and fixed, and incorporate both kith and kin (Sneath, 1999).
Typically the more intense, frequent, and fixed relationships are formed with close kin, while
the more flexible, circumstantial relationships form with friends, distant relations, and
acquaintances (Sneath, 1999). Empson (2007) suggests that flexible relations are needed
within a ‘nomadic’ culture in which constant movement means it is highly important to
incorporate new people, or ‘outsiders’, within one’s kin network. This is further highlighted
linguistically; for example the term ‘ах дүү’ (ax duu) literally translates as ‘younger and older
sibling’, but is used to describe close friends with one’s network (Sneath, 1999; Empson,
2007). Hence, although the firmest relationships are generally with family members, friends
and acquaintances can be conceptualised as kin and obtain quasi-kinship to play a primary
role within an individual’s network of social relations of obligation.

Sneath (1999) further suggests that these social relations of obligation are not a uniform,
recorded exchange of goods and services, but reflect people’s roles. For example, “Elder kin
are expected to provide assistance such as advice, influence and material goods or money;
while juniors are expected to provide respect, obedience, and labour” (Sneath, 1999, p. 141).
Hence, the actual manifestations of these relationships reflect the individual’s power, wealth,
and status within the hierarchy of society.

These networks have operated and been a major part of Mongolian culture throughout history
(Sneath, 1999). Jagchid and Hyer (1979) attest to the pre-revolutionary importance of
friendship and family connections, while in James Gillmore’s 1893 classic Among the
Mongols, the author was unable to purchase a camel for any price but had to buy one through
a Mongol friend who used his personal connections to arrange the deal. This continued into
the Communist period, as Sneath comments:

In the collective era the plethora of bureaucratic procedures and the need for
authorisation of all sorts of actions made connections of vital importance. Resources
of all sorts were accessed through persons in key positions, rather than with cash; and
this made the use of one’s network the best – even the only – way to get things done
(p. 142).

Furthermore, within contemporary society, declining state services and increasing poverty
have ensured that networks and connections have an important role (Odgaard, 1999; Sneath,
1999). Rural Mongolian families have often had to make use of relationships to gain access to
basic goods, such as food stuffs, and services, such as healthcare, while well-placed kith and
kin can help secure jobs and grazing rights. Meanwhile, networks allow for household splitting, a common strategy employed by rural Mongolians to diversify their livelihoods. Thus by extending their networks into the хөдөө (hodoo), sums, aimag centres, and Ulaanbaatar, rural people are able to decrease the risks and shocks associated with poverty (Sneath, 1999; Stewart, 2000).

2.4.4 Participation in Rural Mongolian Development Projects

Within the development literature, it appears that no case studies exist which have specifically explored the concept of participation within Mongolian rural development projects. However, because of the increasing environmental degradation of Mongolia’s pastureland and water resources, a number of authors have described participatory projects which have utilised herder collective action or community management as a response. This section, while not delving into the debate surrounding Mongolia’s pastureland management, will review three of these case studies which contain pertinent information with regards to participation.


Upton’s (2008a) case study presents an empirical, longitudinal analysis of Mongolian herder group formation under the auspices of a GTZ16 conservation project implemented in conjunction with the Mongolian Ministry of Nature and the Environment. This project proved relatively successful in facilitating collective action, with herder groups taking on responsibility for pastureland management as well as providing a network for labour pooling and information sharing. This case study is of particular interest because it incorporated both ‘means’ and ‘end’ concepts of participation, i.e. it used PRA-style techniques with the aim of increased herder participation in management groups.

Upton noted that prior to the project the presence of mistrust was the major barrier to collective action solutions to pastoral problems. Firstly, herders reported a lack of interpersonal trust existed in rural communities, especially beyond immediate kin relationships, seen as a growing ‘selfishness’ or ‘individualism’. Rather than seeing this as originating during Socialism, Upton attributed the rise in mistrust to the post-Socialist era where the demise of the negdel and failures of its successors the kompan and khorsoo

15 A Mongolian term for ‘countryside’, which is conceptualised as the land beyond sums, i.e. that land which contains herders.
16 GTZ or ‘Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit’ is the German government’s development agency.
“…removed stable, state-enforced boundaries for pasture use, regulation and cooperation beyond immediate households” (2008a, p. 181). Secondly, Upton suggested that the current weakness of the local institutions responsible for pastoral management has resulted in mistrust of the state and its officials. Furthermore, herders also reported that uncertainty as to its benefits also restricted their participation in management groups.

In this project Upton suggested that the co-occurrence of GTZ’s intervention and the dire circumstances facing herders promoted collective action, rather than an expectation of economic benefits\(^\text{17}\). According to Upton the GTZ played an important catalytic role by providing and facilitating regular face-to-face interactions between herders and local officials during its PRA-style workshops, trainings, and meetings. In addition, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, especially those which utilised successful groups proved integral. Such personal interactions built trust and a willingness to cooperate amongst herders, and between herders and local officials, and also encouraged these stakeholders to trust GTZ and its interventions. As a result GTZ was described by Upton as a bridging organisation, a ‘catalyst’ and ‘trust-broker’ in social capital formation, concluding that, “Third party intervention [is] integral to the emergence of collective action and trust” (2008a, p. 186). Secondly, Upton noted that the timeliness of GTZ’s interventions was critical, as herders become willing to cooperate once social, economic, political, and environmental issues had reached a crux.

A number of barriers to participation in the GTZ project were identified by Upton. Firstly, herders were unable to join the project or attend its activities because of large geographical distances, a lack of information, poor transport, and high workloads. Secondly, poorer herders could not join or maintain group membership because they could not raise the group membership fee of 50,000 tugricks and a goat, they lacked the capacity to send extra household members to attend group tasks, and they lacked the relational capital to join in groups that often formed along kith and kin bonds. Thirdly, the group’s size and make-up was critical; for example the largest group consisting of 33 households disbanded due to difficulty coordinating activities and an absence of leadership, and groups were reluctant to include new members once the ‘optimal’ size was reached. Lastly, Upton found that the more cautious or ‘risk-averse’ herders delayed membership until they could see the longevity and reliability of group benefits.

\(^{17}\) Upton notes that material benefits did occur, such as organised labour power, increase in livelihood options and regulation of pasture land, and microcredit schemes, but these arose out of the group formation rather than being the specific reasons that groups formed.
According to Upton, participating in the GTZ project brought a mixture of tangible and non-tangible benefits to herders. The intangible benefits consisted of increases in ‘bonding’, ‘bridging’, and ‘linking’ social capital. Meanwhile, participatory techniques enabled herders to discuss and talk openly with one another which led to the development of endogenous solutions to livestock issues, and in this case meant drawing on and recreating group models based on the Collective era. Upton suggests that these non-tangible benefits laid the foundation for the delivery of material benefits, such as land-use contracts with the sum administration, pooled labour, microcredit schemes, and group activities of growing vegetables and repairing wells.


Ykhanbai and Bulgan (2006) described and analysed a participatory action research project that was undertaken by the Mongolian Ministry of Nature and the Environment (MNE) in three Sums to establish pasture-management groups amongst herder communities. A number of participatory mechanisms were viewed as key to the project’s success. Firstly, the project used ‘PRA’ as its underlying method, including tools like focus group meetings, oral testimonies, mapping and diagrams, and semi-structured interviews, which proved “…very effective in sharing information between stakeholders” (2006, p. 5). Secondly, the project’s participatory workshops brought together both local herders and members of the local and national administrative authorities which regulate pastureland access. Thirdly, within the participatory processes, separate women’s workshops and meetings were held to ensure their voices were clearly heard.

Ykhanbai and Bulgan found the main barrier to participation in the project to be the legacy of a centrally planned economy and society. According to the authors, herders struggled to engage with the concept of community decision-making because “During the previous 60 years herders followed instructions from the state [and] now find it difficult to accept responsibility to solve problems independently and apply new management techniques” (2006, p. 15). Furthermore, the legacy of poor urban-to-rural information channels meant herders were often ill-informed about policy reforms which laid the basis for participatory management of pasturelands. Meanwhile, according to Ykhanbai and Bulgan, herders, project staff, and local government officials lacked familiarity and skills of participatory methods because “…participatory approaches and transparent decision-making processes are radical concepts and departures from historical practice” (2006, p. 15). Further barriers were also identified, including geographical distance, which especially precluded women with dual productive and
reproductive responsibilities, and social differentiation, as wealthier herders were often unwilling to join groups with poorer herders.

Apart from an expectation of tangible benefits Ykanbai and Bulgan reported a number of less visible factors motivated herders to participate in this project. Firstly, in a similar vein to Upton’s (2008) findings, the authors suggested external facilitation was a critical factor. However, in this project such facilitation came from existing community structures to include sum government officials, local MNE staff, heads of local NGOs/schools/private companies, and the elected leaders of the herder groups. In addition, the longer time frames employed by the project were understood as a vital component because a lengthy period was needed “…to establish the legitimacy of [participatory] concepts as well as supportive policies” (2006, p. 1).

Ykhanbai and Bulgan suggested that participation in the project brought tangible but also a variety of non-tangible benefits to herders. Firstly, PRA exercises proved catalytic to group formation as they gave herders the chance to meet together and talk, which meant they “…became aware of one another’s views, aspirations, opportunities…and local problems were prioritized and solutions identified” (2006, p. 6). Ykhanbai and Bulgan further suggested that another reason why herders, especially women, participated in meetings was that these gatherings met an unfilled need of being involved in a community. In this regard group meetings also acted as a place for community social activities and services, where “…people could meet one another and chat, get community help when someone was sick or needed money, or learn the best practises of herding, farming and livelihood improvements from each other” (2006, p. 7).

S. Schmidt – ‘Pastoral Community Organization, Livelihoods and Biodiversity Conservation in Mongolia’s Southern Gobi Region’ (2006a); S. Schmidt et al. –‘Rural Livelihoods and Access to Forest Resources in Mongolia: Methodology and Case Studies of Tsenkher Soum’18, Ulaan Uul Soum, Binder Soum, Teshig Soum and Baynlig Soum’ (2006b)

Schmidt is a development practitioner who has written several papers which describe participatory approaches within pastureland and protected area development projects in rural Mongolia. Schmidt highlights a number of practical aspects which contribute to the success of participatory methodology. Firstly, PRA techniques proved valuable in eliciting information about and insights into community issues from herders, which then led to group discussions

18 ‘Soum’ is an alternative transliteration for ‘sum’.
and the initiation of community action. While a project facilitator was used to start this process, Schmidt notes “…often facilitators left the initial community meetings when problems and opportunities had been identified and the group had begun to plan collective action” (2006a, p. 21). Secondly, successful groups had a clear internal leadership structure consisting of a leader identified by group consensus, a leadership council, as well as community funds, and a community meeting place. Thirdly, the project’s primary role was that of facilitation with any material assistance provided as co-funding, with participants expected to at least contribute to the cost of training fees. Lastly, Schmidt suggests that participatory approaches take time, flexibility, and adaptability, especially in Mongolia’s context where new institutional and legal frameworks are being developed.

Alongside Upton (2008) and Ykhanbai and Bulgan (2006), Schmidt also recognised the specific circumstances of the Mongolian herder, i.e. distance, weather, sparse population, gender-based workloads, and mobility, as major obstacles to group participation. In addition, Schmidt acknowledges that a lack of material benefits may inhibit local participation, suggesting this occurs when participatory techniques are used to primarily extract data with no follow-up benefits, or the only benefit is to inform policy formation. Furthermore, Schmidt states that if these are herders’ past experiences of project participation they will be less likely to undergo the rigours of participatory exercises. Schmidt also suggests the current mistrust herders have in the government means that projects which are advertised or implemented by government partners could inhibit local participation.

According to Schmidt the empowerment of the herders was the major non-tangible benefit of the projects. Empowerment came as groups allowed herders to collectively solve problems and make decisions, while through the process of group development herders learnt about principles of good governance. These empowered groups then became more able and active partners in pasture management, started to address other rural development issues, and more effectively communicated their concerns and demands to the local government. In this regard, linkages were also seen as the critical element to empowerment, as Schmidt noted, “An important strategy for the empowerment of local communities has been the development of linkages on local, national and international levels” (2006a, p. 28).

Summary
These studies have provided a background to some of the issues regarding ‘participation’ in rural Mongolian pastureland management projects. However, these studies were not
principally concerned with the concept of participation, while Ykhanbai and Bulgan’s (2006) and Schmidt’s (2006a, 2006b) writings were based upon their own experiences in projects rather than a broad analysis of the projects’ stakeholders. Therefore, gaps in the literature remain: principally, how do the stakeholders in the broad range of rural development projects in Mongolia interpret participation, including its benefits, motivating factors, and barriers?

### 2.5 Conclusion

The concept of local ‘participation’ has emerged as one of the foundational pillars of development assistance within its current people-centred paradigm. Although initially a populist term, ‘participation’ is inherently ambiguous when used within development projects, containing various definitions, conceptualisations, and purposes. From the literature reviewed it has appeared that interpretations of participation hinge upon one key factor – the level of local decision-making. Therefore, in the continuum of participation in development projects, local people have little influence on decision-making processes at lower levels, while at higher levels local people become the key decision makers and hence determine the project’s direction. Participating in development projects results in benefits for the stakeholders and these are typically conceptualised as tangible (or ‘economic’), or intangible benefits, with higher-levels of participation linked to increased intangible benefits, like empowerment, social capital, and self-confidence. A wide range of factors can influence local people’s participation in development projects. While local people may be motivated to participate by economic, social, or polity incentives, the absence of these incentives and/or numerous other factors, like geography and gender, can act as a barrier to projects. Moreover, the literature review has shown that development stakeholders interpret and engage with participatory concepts dependent upon their unique circumstances. While a number of case studies have investigated ‘participation’ in rural development projects, fewer have researched participation’s benefits and influencing factors, and as yet none have focused their attention on Mongolia. Thus, it is unclear as to the extent and manner that culture, local context, social/economic/political circumstances, and history affect the stakeholders’ interpretations of participation in Mongolian rural development projects.
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction
This chapter describes the methodology employed within the research and offers explanations for the chosen approach and methods. The methodology was selected to fulfil the research’s purpose of exploring interpretations of ‘participation’ in Mongolian rural development projects and because it was well-suited to Mongolian culture and the local context. Firstly, the research rationale and strategy which were needed to explore ‘participation’ are explained, followed by a description of the methods used in attaining rich in-depth data, and how this data was analysed. Additionally, the research’s ethics, cross-cultural considerations, and limitations and constraints are considered.

3.2 Research Rationale
The purpose of this research is to explore the interpretations of the concept of ‘participation’ in Mongolian rural development projects through the perspectives of those involved (i.e. the stakeholders). This research therefore is grounded within the interpretative social science paradigm, as it seeks to understand and describe social life, and discover how people construct meaning in natural settings to learn what is meaningful or relevant to the people being studied (Neuman, 2000 p.71). This research’s function is not to make authoritative statements regarding participation in development initiatives, but to generate ideas and knowledge about a previously unexplored topic: participation in Mongolian rural development projects. Thus while this research is principally exploratory, to fulfil this function it is also ‘descriptive’ – it seeks to describe in detail these interpretations of participation – and ‘explanatory’ – it attempts to offer an explanation for these interpretations based upon contextual issues (Neuman, 2000; Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

Arising from its purpose, this research has adopted an inductive and qualitative approach. In inductive logic, research begins with a topic or vague concept and through observations about the phenomenon moves towards pattern seeking, generalisations, and ideas, i.e. theory is built from the ground up (‘grounded theory’) (Neuman, 2000). This study utilised an inductive approach as the researcher progressed from initial observations and curiosity (attained while living in Mongolia), through the collection of data, to finally a description of participation in Mongolian rural development projects.
For reasons stemming from its inductive roots and specific purpose and objectives, this research employed a qualitative approach, which “…seeks to explore the meanings of people’s worlds – the myriad personal impacts of impersonal social structures, and the nature and causes of individual behaviour” (Brockington & Sullivan, 2003, p.57). Firstly, a qualitative approach gave this study the flexibility needed for exploratory research and hence adjustments in its focus over time. Secondly, because qualitative methodology attains in-depth, detailed data that highlights difference and divergence, it provided this research the opportunity to attain a descriptively rich picture of ‘participation’ (Patton, 2002; Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Compared to a quantitative approach, qualitative research is typically based on a smaller number of people and cases, which reduces its generalisability (Patton, 2002) and means it is often criticised as being subjective and highly contextual (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). However, only because qualitative data is highly contextual can it be used to interpret and understand complex phenomena (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Hence, a qualitative approach also enabled this research to suggest explanations of why stakeholders interpreted participation in a certain manner. Furthermore, qualitative data-collection methods, such as interviews and casual conversations, enable personal, empathetic interactions between the researcher and respondent (Brockington & Sullivan, 2003). These face-to-face interactions are appropriate to Mongolian culture which emphasises relationship and allowed the researcher the opportunity to establish the trust and respect needed for respondents to talk openly. Meanwhile, the informal conversation style of interviews allowed Mongolian respondents to adopt a more natural style of talking around the topic, and mitigated other research issues, such as poor communication infrastructure and illiteracy.

3.3 Research Strategy

This research’s strategy consisted of three case studies of stakeholder interpretations of participation in Mongolian rural development projects. According to Yin, “A case study is an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (2003, p.13). In this regard, case studies allowed this research to retain the holistic, meaningful characteristics of real-life events by examining stakeholder interpretations of participation not in isolation, but in relationship to a development project, Mongolian culture, and the context of rural Mongolia. Furthermore, because case studies highlight, rather than disconnect, the local context they answer Nelson and Wright’s call for a “critical analysis of ethnographic contexts to see how the discourse and procedures of participation actually work
in practice” (1995, p. 2), and have been used extensively within development research into ‘participation’.

The research strategy consisted of three case studies and multiple units of analysis, giving it an embedded, multiple case-study design. According to Yin (2003) multiple case-study designs provide more compelling evidence and are considered more robust. Three case studies were selected for this research because this allows for a triangulation of data (Davidson & Tolich, 2003) and ‘replication logic’ (Yin, 2003). By having three, rather than one case study, the data obtained could be analysed in comparison to each case study to show similarities or divergences which exist despite or as a result of the contextual differences. Multiple case studies therefore increase the external generalisability of research, as the emergent themes arise from case studies of various circumstances, and hence mitigate criticisms about the uniqueness or artifactual conditions which surround a single case study design (Yin, 2003).

It could be argued that in this research a single case study would have provided the more detailed and contextualised data that is suited to an ethnographic approach. However, the research’s ethnographic focus was strengthened because three case studies added breadth to the data and enabled cultural components to be extracted from the complexities of development projects. Moreover, in addition to the case studies, interviews were conducted with Mongolians and Western expatriates about Mongolian culture, which meant ethnographic observations could be interpreted in light of data obtained outside the sphere of a development project. Meanwhile, three case studies were suited to the research’s exploratory purpose, as Patton comments, “Less depth from a larger number of people can be especially helpful in exploring a phenomenon and trying to document diversity or understand variation (2002, p. 244).

### 3.4 Research Methods

The following research methods were employed to attain the rich, in-depth data needed to answer the research’s aim and subsequent key questions.

#### 3.4.1 Pre-Field Work

Prior to the field work phase, the three case study projects were selected, relevant literature was collected, and interview questions were prepared.
To secure the case studies, three development organisations in Mongolia were chosen through purposive sampling. These specific organisations were selected because of the researcher’s prior relationship with key personnel (or associates of key personnel), because they were well-established in Mongolia (greater than 10 years), and because they reflected a cross-section of development organisations (multi-lateral, bilateral, NGO). The organisations were approached by email, and permission to include one of their projects in the research was sought and granted. One project from each of the three organisations was selected by the researcher and the development organisations through ‘criterion’ sampling, which enabled diverse data, set around a central theme to be collected (Patton, 2002). Projects had to be rural (implemented at the sum or bag level), have a lifespan of three to ten years, termed ‘participatory’, and have poverty reduction as an overarching objective.

The process of collecting relevant literature and building knowledge began prior to the field work and continued on throughout the research process. This continuing acquisition meant the research became a dynamic process, whereby research themes, ideas, and questions were shaped over the research’s lifespan. Once the projects had been selected, documentation pertaining to the development organisations’ core principles and the projects’ details were obtained and analysed, and background reading on the project’s focus areas was undertaken. This information helped submerge the researcher in the projects’ context prior to the fieldwork, and enabled a comparison of real-life realities to ‘official’ discourses.

The question prompts for the semi-structured interviews, having arisen out of the literature reviewed, were prepared in New Zealand. These questions were piloted in New Zealand on a non-Western development worker and a New Zealander who formerly worked in Mongolian development projects to test their fluidity and effectiveness in eliciting meaningful responses, with subsequent changes made (Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

3.4.2 Field Work
The field-based component of the research took place over period of six and a half weeks in Mongolia in May/June 2008. The late spring/early summer was chosen because at this time of year in Mongolia the roads and weather are most conducive to travelling, and rural communities have typically finished with cashmere and livestock reproductive tasks but are yet to enter the summer vacation period. The research was carried out in sums and aimags centres of Bayanhongor and Hentii aimags, and in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. The first few days of field work were spent in translation work and in establishing contact and
relationships with the three development organisations’ managers, who helped the researcher plan the logistics of project site visits. The subsequent weeks were spent collecting data with blocks of approximately ten days spent sequentially on each case study, which allowed the researcher the opportunity to focus on one case study at a time. Typically, the timeline of interviews progressed through the development chain, from managers to field staff to project participants/non-participants.

During the field work a translator (a female Mongolian) was employed in order to help mitigate the language and cultural barriers. This translator, a qualified English teacher, was well known to the researcher as she had translated for him on numerous occasions during his previous time in Mongolia. Because of the level of friendship that existed between the researcher and translator and the previous experience of working together, the translator could be trusted to provide accurate and honest translation. Moreover, as a former resident of the Sums where two of the projects resided and due to the respect afforded teachers in Mongolian society, the translator provided the research team with credibility and trust in the rural context.

**Selection of Participants**

To fulfil this study’s aim of exploring stakeholder interpretations of participation, within each case study, three types of stakeholders were interviewed: development organisation managers (based in Ulaanbaatar), field staff (located in aimag centres and sums), and local people of the project sites (participants and non-participants). The interviewees within these groups were selected through various forms of purposive sampling, as the choice of subjects was guided by the researcher’s judgement (Sarantakos, 2005). In a reflection of Mongolian culture and context, relationship and availability played a key role in this judgement. Purposive sampling was suited to the research’s purpose of gaining a deeper understanding on the topic rather than a representative, objective measurement of participation in Mongolian rural development projects (Sarantakos, 2005).

Once arriving in Mongolia the research team contacted the development organisation managers by phone to arrange a preliminary meeting. This initial personal meeting enabled the researcher to introduce himself and the research, and answer any questions which in turn established relationship and credibility. At these meetings subsequent interviews with

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19 The research team consisted of the researcher and a Mongolian translator/research assistant.
Ulaanbaatar-based managers were scheduled and the contact details were obtained for the projects’ field staff. The development organisation managers contacted these field staff to inform them of the research; however, to the researcher’s knowledge they were not placed under any duress to participate in the research. Prior to travelling to the project sites, field staff were contacted by the research team and meetings were set up. Then once arriving at the project sites, typically a casual introductory meeting took place with field staff, where a follow-up time and place for the official interview were arranged. A mobile phone and flexibility were vital in arranging these interviews, as last minute changes to interview times and locations were frequent. Not all of the projects’ managers or field staff were interviewed, but only those available during the research’s tight schedule; thus a convenience sampling method was often employed (Sarantakos, 2005).

In order to negate power imbalances and to create a more open, non-threatening environment for interviews, local people of the project sites were selected without the direct assistance of the field staff. During their interviews, field staff gave the researcher the names of a few prominent project participants. The research team then travelled to the project sites (or adjacent villages) to locate these individuals, introduce themselves and the research, and seek permission for an interview. This interviewee was then asked to recommend other local people (both participants and non-participants) for an interview, and typically accompanied the research team to meet them and provide introductions. This snowball sampling technique was considered appropriate to the Mongolian culture of hospitality and relationship and necessary due to the lack of communication infrastructure (Sarantakos, 2005). Additionally, because the researcher spent considerable time simply interacting with local people at the project sites, a number of interviews arose out of this natural setting. This was a form of convenience and criterion sampling, as interviewees were selected because they were involved in the projects and happened to be at the site at the same time as the researcher (Patton, 2002).

**Data Collection**

During the field research, semi-structured interviews were the principal data-collection method, with casual conversation, observations, and written documentation playing a supporting role. Semi-structured interviews were selected for their ability to yield thick, descriptive data and their compatibility with Mongolian culture (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Prior to the interviews a period of time was spent with interviewees talking over non-research related topics – the weather was discussed, family stories were exchanged – and thus
relationship was established. The interviews were loosely structured around a series of open-ended questions and potential prompts, which covered the research’s main questions (see Appendix III). Typically, the interviews took on the nature of an open, interactive discussion where the interviewee took an active ‘expert’ role and told their story while the researcher guided and probed (Sarantakos, 2005). This informality and flexibility gave the interviewees the opportunity to talk around the issue and reveal new knowledge and fresh perspectives while not feeling intimidated or scrutinised (Sarantakos, 2005). Because non-verbal cues can be a powerful means of communication, observations were recorded in a research notebook during these interviews (Dodd, 1998). Meanwhile, because interviews were conducted in informal settings, interviews that started with individuals often became group interviews, as people entered into the interview space and added to the discussion.

The semi-structured interview questions had been translated into Mongolian by the research team, and piloted and adjusted to ensure accuracy and fluidity. During the Mongolian language interviews, the open-ended questions were asked by the translator, who would then, if required, translate the response to the researcher. This allowed the interviews to flow in a normal conversational style, rather than being continuously interrupted by repeated translations. Follow-up questions and prompts were then asked by both the researcher and/or translator in the Mongolian language. Meanwhile, during the English language interviews, the translator was still present to provide translation assistance. Prior to the interviews, consent was obtained (no respondents refused) for a digital recording device to be used, and the data was subsequently stored on a laptop computer. The data from the interviews was translated and transcribed as soon as possible after the event to allow the data to influence the course of future interviews.

During the field-work phase, peer observations and casual conversations were a central and natural part of the daily interactions with people and recorded within a ‘field notebook’. Peer observations are useful tool in ethnographic research because they allow the researcher to more fully understand cultural phenomena (Brockington & Sullivan, 2003); however, a common critique of observation techniques is the impact of the researcher’s subjectivity (Clifford, 1988, cited in Brockington & Sullivan, 2003). To mitigate this possibility any cultural observations were discussed and triangulated with the translator and cultural informants. In this research peer observations allowed the researcher to interact and view the field staff and local people within the projects’ activities which helped set interviews within their real-life context. In addition, casual conversations with interviewees and non-interviews
took place throughout the fieldwork phase. Because these casual conversations (i.e. spontaneous dialogue which was not recorded), occurred outside the boundaries of official interviews they often revealed more raw, emotive, or controversial data. For confidentiality reasons, this data was not treated as primary data and quotations have not been used within the results section. Rather, these conversations allowed the researcher to probe deeper and more accurately within official interviews. Lastly, project documentation (brochures, contracts, reports, etc.) was gathered during the fieldwork phase and allowed the researcher to compare his findings with the development organisations’ official discourse.

Sample and Interview Profile
During the fieldwork phase, a total of 57 people were interviewed. Of these people, 56 were interviewed personally, one person was interviewed over the phone, and one interviewee provided follow-up information via an email. In a further breakdown, interviews were conducted with nine development organisation managers, 11 field staff, 24 local people, and 12 cultural informants. A sample of this size enabled the research to achieve the breadth and depth necessary to explore, describe, and tentatively explain interpretations of participation (Patton, 2002).

A demographic cross-section of interviewees was achieved in this research, with the demographics of the sample resulting from the purposive sampling technique and the accessibility of the interviewees. The age of the research’s participants ranged from 20 to 67, with only those 18 years or older eligible to participate. The case studies were composed of 24 males and 20 female interviews; while in the cultural informant interviews, nine males and four females took part. Official interviews lasted from 20- to 120- minutes, with an average length of around 50 minutes. However, casual conversations and socialising greatly increased the time spent interacting with each interviewee; for example, a 30-minute ‘interview’ could easily span two hours. Interviews were conducted wherever the participants indicated they felt comfortable, which meant offices, gers, apartments, houses, project sites, cars, coffee shops, and restaurants became interview locations.

3.5 Data Analysis
In line with the research’s inductive, qualitative approach, multiple case-study design, and cross-cultural nature, the analysis of data was an iterative process occurring both during and after the data fieldwork phase (Sarantakos, 2005). During the fieldwork phase all interviews were translated from Mongolian to English and/or transcribed onto a laptop computer. The
entire interviews were translated but not transcribed word-for-word. Instead, within each interview, only relevant sections were transcribed and arranged thematically, with key quotes re-checked for their translation accuracy. Because the translation, transcription, and initial coding occurred during the fieldwork phase, this data was then used as a springboard to guide later interviews, observations, and casual conversations (Sarantakos, 2005).

Once back in New Zealand, the data relating to each case study was analysed separately. Each case study’s data was analysed in light of the research’s key questions and any emerging patterns, themes, sequences, and differences were coded accordingly (Patton, 2002). Within each case study, themes and subthemes were then grouped together through a series of poster matrices which helped the researcher to organise and manage the data while also gaining an overall picture (Patton, 2002). Each case study was then described thematically and supported by interview quotes; together these comprise the results section of this thesis (see Chapter Five). Following this, the three case studies were then analysed collectively in light of the research themes, the literature review, and in relation to each other to form the discussion section of this thesis (see Chapter Six).

3.6 Ethics

In light of the cross-cultural and socio-economic background to this research, ethics remained a paramount concern through all its stages. The basic ethical principles of research, as described by Davidson and Tolich (2003), were adhered to: first, do no harm; voluntary participation; anonymity and confidentiality; avoidance of deceit; and the faithful analysis and reporting of data. Moreover, this research sought to not only protect its participants, but also attempted to improve their situation and ‘to do good’ (Scheyvens, Nowak & Scheyvens, 2003). Thus, over the course of the research, efforts were made to establish mutually beneficial relationships with participants while acting in a culturally sensitive, empathetic, and respectful manner.

After introductory conversations potential participants were presented with an information sheet (in both English and Mongolian) that outlined the background, aims, voluntary nature, and expectations of the research (see Appendix I). Written consent was obtained prior to interviews beginning, and interviewees were also informed of their rights to refuse to answer any questions and withdraw from the research (see Appendix II). Meanwhile, because many of the participants did not care for the formality of the information sheet and consent form, or had difficulty reading them, the research team also offered a thorough verbal explanation of
the research, and answered any questions that arose (Scheyvens et al., 2003). The research did not at any stage employ deceit or pressure, and any queries were answered to the best of the research team’s knowledge.

Ethics approval had been sought and granted by the Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee. In line with this committee’s guidelines, the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was protected by issuing research participants and the projects with a pseudonym which was used through the course of data transcriptions, analysis, and written and oral presentations.

Both obvious and subtle power differentials exist between the researcher and research participants in development research (Scheyvens et al., 2003). While it is impossible to fully negate these power inequalities, steps were actively taken to reduce the imbalance. For example, the research team had no existing dependent relationships with any of the research participants; interviews were conducted in the participants’ preferred language and location; the research team offered and accepted hospitality, conversed in Mongolian, and socialised (drunk tea, ate, worked alongside, etc.) with participants.

Research, especially development research, has often been criticised on ethical and moral grounds as being one-sided, arguing that much is taken but little is returned (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). In light of this, and because of the cultural norms of hospitality and socio-economic situations of many participants, gifts or ‘reciprocity’ were given after interviews. To project participants and non-participants, gifts of basic food-stuffs were given, while to development staff and cultural informants, New Zealand souvenirs were gifted or a restaurant meal was provided. Moreover, many of the interviews resembled a cultural exchange, as questions were answered about New Zealand and the researcher’s personal life. Furthermore, according to Corbridge (1998), development studies scholars have a moral and ethical obligation to not just extract and interact, but also to inform development practice. Hence, the results from this research will be disseminated within the New Zealand development community and to the case study development organisations.

3.7 Cross-Cultural Considerations

Although cross-cultural research has many critics, it continues to remain part of development studies on the acknowledgement that, though results may be skewed by ethnographic
differences, such research leads to a multiplicity of perspectives which can be valuable in developing a detailed understanding of complex development issues (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). To lessen any cultural bias the research’s methods were conducted in a manner appropriate to Mongolian culture. This means an emphasis was placed on relationship building, hospitality, and flexibility. Although the researcher has lived in rural Mongolia (2002 - 2005), his knowledge of Mongolian language, customs, and traditions are by no means exhaustive. Hence, the research translator also acted as a cultural informant, and helped ensure that the research was conducted in a culturally sensitive manner.

Of particular importance to this research was the establishment of relationship with the research participants, through speaking Mongolian, engaging in normal rural topics of conversation, and following traditional practices. Likewise, because the researcher and translator had both lived in rural Mongolia previously and knew many friends or relatives of the participants they were not ‘outsiders’ but ‘insiders’ to the rural community, which permitted more genuine interactions. As such, many vital aspects of the research were only made possible because of the research team’s (tandag humuus) networks within Mongolia; for example, the permission to research the three projects, accommodation, transport, etc.

3.7 Limitations and Constraints
This research was limited and constrained by its methodology, cross-cultural nature, and field-level practicalities.

As stated earlier, this research’s methodology comprised of case studies of three different rural development projects, each united by a common set of characteristics. While this provides a detailed and broad picture of participation, the differences between these three projects hinder the research’s ability to make comparisons between them and glean common themes. In addition, because a case study approach was employed to take a ‘snapshot’ of only three projects, the findings are limited in their applicability to other Mongolian rural development projects (Neuman, 2000). This study’s findings are fixed to a certain time, place, and context and therefore can only serve to highlight potential challenges and opportunities for other rural development projects in Mongolia and other similar countries. Moreover because of time, resource, and logistical constraints not everyone involved or associated in the projects could be interviewed, thus limiting this study’s ability to provide a more thorough representation or deeper analysis.
Secondly, as the researcher is a New Zealander and not Mongolian, this study is inherently limited by its cross-cultural nature. A number of techniques were enlisted (a translator, cultural and language knowledge, emphasis on relationship, etc.) to help mitigate any cultural issues. However, because the researcher views and interprets the world through his own cultural lens, there are undoubtedly parts of this study influenced by the researcher’s non-Mongolian world view. While this may be seen as a constraint, some authors suggest that an ‘outside’ or ‘non-local’ perspective brings fresh, meaningful, and legitimate insights that could not be attained by ‘insider’ research (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003). Meanwhile, the lens through which interviewees perceive the researcher and translator (for example, powerful, ‘outsider’, an interruption, etc.) may also inhibit the truthfulness of responses. While this is true in any person-to-person interaction, it would appear to hold even greater force in Mongolia given the culture of social differentiation, authoritarianism, and belen setgeltey (dependent spirit). This was particularly evidenced by local people automatically assuming that the research team was connected to the development organisations and by the changes to the nature of the interview once it was understood that this research was being undertaken independently. Furthermore, the majority of interviews in this study were carried out in the Mongolian language and translated together by the research team. This means translator error or bias could have crept into the research, and the nuances and exact meanings of the Mongolian interviews could have been lost or compromised in the translation process.

Thirdly, above and beyond the normal time pressures and resource restrictions associated with research (Sarantakos, 2005), the practical considerations of qualitative field-research in Mongolia also limited the number, length, and type of interviews conducted. Because the case study projects were in rural areas, where transport or communication is scarce and unpredictable, gaining access to interviewees took considerable time. Initially it was planned to travel by airplane to rural areas; however, because of the recent rise in basic prices (accommodation, petrol, food, etc.) the research budget had to be significantly tightened. This meant ground transport was used, which further increased travel time. Meanwhile, because of the cultural importance of relationship in Mongolia, interviews were only conducted after previous introductions and/or socialising, which meant repeated visits to offices or long periods of ‘chewing the fat’. Thus, because of limited resources not as many ‘non-participants’ were interviewed as originally hoped for. Furthermore, a small portion of the stakeholders approached (typically development staff), although initially indicating their willingness, failed to appear for scheduled interviews. The reasons given included busyness given the imminent national government elections. Lastly, it was planned to use explanatory
drawing techniques as a data collection method to facilitate communication and discussion (McCracken et al., 1998, cited in Campbell, 2001). However, this method was discarded after pilot interviewees struggled to engage with this technique, preferring to ‘just talk’, and it also proved difficult to implement within the rural setting of dust, dirt, and outside interview localities.
Chapter Four: Results

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of this study into stakeholder interpretations of the concept of participation in Mongolia rural development projects. Firstly, in response to gaps in literature and to build the research’s context, Section 4.2 presents insights into the inner layer of Mongolian culture obtained from Mongolian cultural interviews. Then in Sections 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 the results from the three projects are presented as individual case studies. In each of these case studies the results are described thematically in accordance with the research’s key questions: how did stakeholders understand the concept of ‘participation’, including practical, theoretical, and linguistic elements?; what did stakeholders perceive as the benefits of participation?; and what factors influence participation, including motivations and barriers to participation? In an effort to add depth of meaning and build the research’s background, each case study begins with an introductory background on the project, while quotations and a Mongolian terms and idioms are used throughout the text.

4.2 Insights from Mongolian Cultural Interviews

This section will present results about the inner layer of Mongolia culture (i.e. the shared assumptions, values, and beliefs that result in characteristic behaviours (Storti, 1999)) obtained from interviews with Mongolians and ‘Western’ expatriates living in Mongolia. These interviews included seven with Western Cultural Informants\(^{20}\) (WCIs) who had lived in Mongolia for between three and 15 years, and one interview and two focus groups, one of two and one of four people, with Mongolian Cultural Informants (MCIs). Whilst the topic of ‘Mongolian culture’ is broad and complex, this section is intended to provide insights into components of Mongolian culture that relate to the research’s aim (see Appendix III for question prompts).

**Societal Groups**

Cultural Informants (CIs\(^{21}\)) suggested that in Mongolia, groups, rather than individuals, are the basic and most important unit within society and evidenced by the prevalence of group

\(^{20}\) Interviews with two development organisation managers are included in this number.

\(^{21}\) The term CIs (Cultural Informants) will be used to designate instances in which both Mongolian and Western cultural informants agreed.
thought, group networks, and herder groups within Mongolian culture. Firstly, CIs reported that Mongolians’ thoughts and day-to-day actions are typically driven by the collective interests of the group, as WCI 1 explained:

*Today is high-school graduation celebration day. However, the kids haven’t graduated yet but they will have a party first for the sake of the group. A quarter of the kids won’t actually graduate but they pretend they will for the sake of the group.... Here you don’t separate anyone from the group.*

Additionally, it was suggested that this group mentality was strengthened during the Communist era, as MCI 3 reported, “*During communism we used to have slogans like, ‘One person for others, others for one person.’*”

Secondly, CIs reported that Mongolian culture is based upon membership in a network of groups. Rather than belonging to a singular, static, homogenous group, Mongolians, belong to a variety of smaller sub-groups, which combine to form an individual’s ‘in-group’ (see Figure: 3). A person’s ‘in-group’ was most commonly described by the term ‘тандаг хүмүүс’ (*tandag humuus*) which literally means ‘known people’ and includes those people with whom one has a relationship. As such, the term *tandag humuus* is an umbrella term which encapsulates the sub-groups in which a Mongolian maintains membership, such as the immediate family (*ам бүл*), relatives (*хамаатан, ах дүү нар*), those one lives with (*хот айл, айл*), work colleagues (*хамт ажилчин*), friends (*дотнын найз, дотнын хүмүүс*), class mates (*өг ангын хүмүүс*), etc. The members of these sub-groups provide mutual assistance to one another, for example, money, food, accommodation, jobs, and encouragement. This *tandag humuus* network acts as a way for Mongolians to find their footing in society as well as a social safety net and therefore is the manifest form of Sneath’s ‘social relations of obligations’ (1999). These relationships of obligation with one’s *tandag humuus* needed to be handled correctly by assisting or giving gifts to members of the *tandag humuus* when circumstances allowed, which in turn obligates them to reciprocate such actions. CIs reported that, typically, this group of *tandag humuus* has a number of important members which remained fixed, like close relatives, whilst other members rotated dependent upon circumstance and location.

Thirdly, CIs reported that herders and rural dwellers (those in *sums* and *aimag* centres) often live together in groups of between three to five families (friends and relatives), referred to as
'xom aûr,' (khot ail) or ‘aûr’ (ail). CIs reported that, amongst herders these groups are formed for economic reasons, temporarily combining labour to increase efficiency of certain livestock tasks. However, the individual families within these groups made their own decisions about livestock practices and movements. In addition, the *khot ail* would also form a sub-group of a Mongolian’s *tandag humuus*.

**Figure 3: A Mongolian’s Tandag Humuus and Network of Social Obligation**

![Diagram](image)

Note: This pictorial representation of a Mongolian in-groups shows that only some members of one’s sub-groups enter into a relationship of social obligation or ‘mutual reciprocity’ as indicated by the symbol: ←→ .

Meanwhile, CIs’ feedback and circumstantial evidence suggested that groups in Mongolia function best with fewer than 30 members. Firstly, CIs suggested that a Mongolian’s group of *tandag humuus* would generally consist of between ten to 30 individuals. Interestingly, a number of CIs reported that cooperatives of greater than 30 members tended to dissolve easier, because this is the upper limit of trusting relationships maintained by Mongolians. In addition, during the researcher’s time in Mongolia, it was noticed that while 15 to 20 individuals travelling by van would quickly interact with each other, during bus trips of more than 30 people, the interpersonal interactions were stifled. Furthermore, with three to five families, the members of a *khot ail* would be between around 20 people, whilst 30 people was the upper limit of a *ger*’s seating capacity.

While all CIs reported that groups are highly important within Mongolian culture, it was also suggested that individualism is on the rise. This increase is associated with the recent change to a democratic, free-market economy, and seen as a both a positive, “There is now some
room for individual thought and action” (WCI 4), and a negative outcome, “If people can make a dollar today they will now steal from those in their group” (WCI 3).

**Hierarchical Society**

All CIs reported that Mongolian society has a clear hierarchical structure. These different layers of society are based on wealth and power, and defined as “the poor, middle, and rich classes” (WCI 6). Furthermore, CIs suggested that the various classes of society do not readily mix, reminiscent of a high-power distance culture (Dodd, 1998). Therefore a Mongolian’s *tandag humuus* generally consists of people from within one’s own stratum of society, and contains only a few members from either above or below one’s station. This delineation of society was said to be ingrained, so that “people here just know who the *darag* and saxural are, and who the people are who are up there at the top level” (WCI 1).

Meanwhile, CIs also reported a growing divide between the urban (Ulaanbaatar-based) and different sectors of the rural populace, because of wealth, education, opportunities, etc. For example, WCI 1 commented, “The gap is rising between the urban and rural populace...and urban people look down on the rural people, and Ulaanbaatar people look down on aimag people who look down on sum people who look down on herders.”

**Leadership Style**

Mongolian leadership style was described by CIs with words such as ‘authoritarian,’ ‘top-down,’ and ‘centralised’. These words denote a leadership style whereby power is held by a small number of people, and unquestioned obedience to leadership is expected. A number of WCIs reported that this leadership style has dominated Mongolia’s history of governance and prevailed within the current political system, where major decisions affecting the rural areas, such as budget allocations, tasks and scheduling, are still completed by the central government in Ulaanbaatar. As a result WCI 2 suggested, “[Mongolia government] has some participation within the decision-making process which is reinforced by a relatively powerful structure...rather than a truly participatory democratic approach.”

According to CIs, Mongolian leaders have a number of key characteristics, whether they are leaders in the political, business, or community fields. Firstly, leaders typically lead through an authoritarian style, as WCI 5 explained:

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22 A number of CIs mentioned the ‘10,000 rich people,’ or ‘арав мянгаын баян хүмүүс,’ a Mongolian term used to describe the highest stratum of society.
23 *Darag* or ‘дараг’ is the Mongolian word for ‘boss’.
24 *Saxural* or ‘захирал’ is the Mongolian word for ‘director’.
The local leadership style here is not participatory in any way.... People gather around the boss and await instructions and what that person says they will do.... Shoulder to shoulder egalitarian stuff doesn’t work well here, people won’t respect it. Its communist style top-down, the boss doesn’t do physical work...people respect the boss if he’s yelling at them.

Likewise, CIs suggested that Mongolian leaders need to be strong, as WCI 2 stated, “Something very much discussed here is the need for a strong leader who has a heart for the people.” This strong leader was defined as “outspoken, unwavering, commanding, not afraid to say what they think” (WCI 4), and “...a little hard. If they say ‘no’ it should be exactly no” (MCI 1). Thirdly, while it was suggested that leaders should attain their position through education, honesty, capability, and hard-work, MCIs noted that “…corruption, power and wealth,” (MCI 2) were also critical factors. In addition, CIs noted that leaders were typically “…older, and have some kind of resources, either connections or financial resources” (WCI 3). Thus, a broad and powerful group of tandag humuus was an essential quality for a leader, as WCI 3 commented, “Mongolians all know who is connected with who, and that is a part of what determines who is the leader.” Furthermore, Mongolian leaders were described as providers, providing material benefits for their constituents through their own wealth, power, and connections; “Leaders should provide many things and activities; people will only choose them if they provide them with things” (MCI 2).

Group Decision-Making Processes

Group decision-making processes are a principle part of participatory development approaches; hence CIs were questioned as to how group decision-making process operated in Mongolia. Firstly, CIs suggested that groups require a single leader, who would also act as the sole decision maker. Within small groups, leadership and group structure are predetermined by the culture’s hierarchical structure, as WCI 1 explained, “If you have a group of five to ten Mongols and they sit down, within ten minutes they all know their position in the group and they know who is going to be the decision maker.” Meanwhile, CIs noted that leadership could not be shared but would be contested amongst those of similar power, as WCI 5 explained:

Power is a commodity here, a zero-sum game...Those people who have about equal power will fight it out for the leadership. Maybe two or three people, will fight it out behind the scenes, through other people, manipulating, bringing up bad things
about others in meeting, and embarrassing them and using that to exert their power. Usually one person wins, then the other leaders quit, and those that are left gather around the winner and wait instruction and what that person says they will do.

Thus the leader/decision-maker would be the most powerful member of the group, with power related to wealth, social connections, age, and social strata.

CIs reported that within group processes, many members would not voice their opinions; hence, group decisions do not arise from a robust participatory debate. Primarily, this was related to the top-down nature of groups, whereby the powerful leader is expected the make the decisions, “chewing through the idea doesn’t happen here because everyone knows their [group] role” (WCI 1). This meant it is normative for group members to listen and obey directives, as CIs explained:

Class division prevents people from talking. If someone is poor they don’t feel like anything they say is important. (WCI 3)

Mongolians are very patient – even if they don’t like the bosses direction they will say okay and go ahead and do it. (MCI 1)

Most people in the group just want to listen to the boss or educated people. (MCI 2)

Both the boss and those lower expect that the boss won’t be questioned…and don’t expect the lower people to become involved in the decision making. (WCI 1)

This silence was often conceptualised by CIs as ‘shyness’ or ‘shame’, but also as ‘fear’, as those with less power are unwilling to speak openly in the presence of the powerful for fear of reprisals. In addition, the Mongolian tendency to avoid conflict was also suggested as a reason why groups do not engage in robust discussions. For example, WCI 2 stated, “Honest confrontation doesn’t happen here, it’s difficult to get people to sit down and talk about a difficult situation…often I’ve heard from Mongols ‘That’s not the Mongolian way.’”

Furthermore, CIs suggested that within groups there was awareness amongst members of what the group is expected to think:

In a group where everyone is going to hear what the others ideas are…there is an awareness of what the group is supposed to think and who is going to lead the group.
It’s the awareness of the group as a whole and the way they are supposed to all think which means you’ll probably get the same answer to questions from people. (WCI 2)

Such a ‘group-think’ phenomenon meant that rather than voicing individual opinions, group members voice what they perceive as ‘group’ opinions, opinions dominated by the most powerful. In contrast, CIs also acknowledged situations exist where Mongolians speak more openly and freely. Situations suggested are: when group consensus is unknown; the likelihood of repercussions for a conflicting opinion are low; and discussions are informal and within one’s own peer groups.

As a result of this top-down style of group processes the majority of CIs reported that the power of the person behind the idea, rather than the quality of the idea, usually determines group decisions. As leadership is grasped by the most powerful, group decisions would thus reflect the wishes of the more powerful. However, CIs also suggested that this phenomenon is evolving, circumstantial, and could be negated. Firstly, MCI 1 pointed out that democratic processes are evolving, so that people would now be more likely to voice their opinion, “Ten years ago the most powerful person would make the decision for the group and everyone would follow him. But now people would say their idea and say what they want.” Meanwhile, MCI 2 suggested that the process of group decision-making depends on the circumstance, such that “In a simple decision the community’s ideas are important, but for an important decision then the people with power should decide.” Finally, a number of CIs suggested that a group facilitator from outside the community could negate entrenched group power dynamics.

Interpersonal Communication

MCIs reported that power differentials affect interpersonal communication in Mongolia. Firstly, it was suggested that the fear of reprisals from powerful people could prevent honest communication:

Some Mongolians are afraid of repression so they won’t tell the truth…People must respect and honour their bosses, and government workers, or those above them, true

25 Mongolian language, or style of speaking.
words don’t suit bureaucracy…. They are afraid of losing their jobs or not receiving government services. (MCI 2)

Furthermore, power differentials could simply stop someone from talking, as MCI 1 stated, “For me if the person is more powerful than me I will just be quiet.” Meanwhile, MCI 2 reported, “Mongolian people tell the more powerful people what they think they want to hear.” Additionally, the potential of powerful people to bring benefits could also cause Mongolians to falsify information, as MCI 2 stated, “For Mongolians they won’t always tell the truth and they will hide things because they want to benefit. For example, if they are asked by a development worker if they have a radio they think that person wants to give them a radio so they will lie.”

Relationship
CIs proposed that Mongolia is a culture of relationship, meaning personal relationships with people are highly important and underpin many aspects of life. For example, relationships or the right ‘connections’ helped secure employment, schooling opportunities, and business contracts, as WCI 3 explained:

Personal relationships seem to make things work here.... Relationships from college and school and family are very important. So if you want to get something done you call someone you went to college with rather than putting out a contract for people to bid on.

At the centre of this culture of relationship was a person’s tandag humuus who could be called upon to provide assistance in all manners of tasks. CIs noted that new relationships were often formed by tandag humuus operating as a bridge between the two parties and further cemented by knowledge of one’s family members, mutual reciprocity, trustworthiness, and a prolonged period of time.

Western ‘Critical Analysis’
A number of CIs suggested that the ‘Western’-style of critical analysis, on which PRA workshops are based, is not commonplace in Mongolia; “Looking at things from a critical point of view is a challenge here” (WCI 3). This difficulty of interacting with a linear, step-by-step western logic of action and future consequence was linked to inexperience, communism, short-time frames, and fatalism. Firstly, according to CIs rural people have little experience with manipulating ideas because of a lack of formal education, a teacher-centred
education system, and the routine nature of traditional livestock herding. For example, WCI 1 stated, “Growing up, countryside people are not chewing over ideas. There is a wealth of information in their heads...but how to manipulate an idea and a concept is something they didn’t grow up and practise.” Secondly, during the Communist system directives for production (factories, agriculture, livestock, etc) had come from central planning committees and focused on inputs and outputs. As a result, according to WCI 3, Mongolians don’t factor “a profit or loss analysis...economic sustainability or social problems” into their business plans.

CIs reported that Mongolians conceptualise the future along shorter time frames, which in turn limits their ability to make long-term plans. This short term orientation is especially prevalent amongst the poor, who “...lack long term planning, and are not thinking of more than a month or at the most a year ahead” (WCI 3). WCI 6 provided a common example of this short-term orientation, “We have the big clean-up days in the aimag centres. Everyone cleans up the city and then they forget about it the next day and continue to throw rubbish anywhere.” In addition, WCI 3, a project manager, noted the effects of this short-term orientation on his current project:

I have had three managers over three years. In a training and research project you need to look at things from year-to-year to see what did well and make changes, but we can’t if there is no continuity. So the willingness to stick to something and think about the long-term is a challenge.

Short term orientations were linked to fatalism26, as WCI 6 commented, “Planning for the future is simply not there in the Mongolian psyche, people are very fatalistic.” WCI 3 explained the effect fatalism has on thought processes:

People here, especially poor people have a thinking that my own decisions and choices don’t necessarily affect my life, or I can’t do anything to change my circumstances, ...it’s more up to fate....The thought that what I do isn’t necessarily connected to the consequences...[is] part of the Tibetan Buddhist world view.

This apparent disconnect between action and consequence runs in opposition to the linear problem solving processes typically used within PRA workshops.

26 During the interviews with project participants a number of people used fatalistic expressions, like ‘γυα манна γαζх,’ which means to ‘endure one’s fate’ (the literal translation is “to see hell’s actions”).
Communist Heritage

CIs were clear that seventy years of communism had left its mark on Mongolian culture. Although a democracy since 1991, CIs felt communist or socialist thoughts and practices still remained, as MCI 3 expressed:

*The communist spirit won’t leave us. Really Mongolia is wearing a mask, to the outside world we are a democracy but behind the mask we are still communist. Really we are crafty communists. Most of the people in power, especially in the countryside, were in power during the communist era.*

One frequently recalled effect of communism is the tendency for Mongolians to view items, such as land, buildings, etc., as common property. MCI 3 described the results of such a view:

*People are unable to take care of property because they never owned their own property so they didn’t care what would happen to it and wouldn’t take responsibility for it. There’s still the thought that someone else, or the state will provide a new item so we don’t need to look after it well.*

This thought was evidenced within one case study project, where staff reported that tools had lasted longer once they were given to individuals rather than the group as a whole.

The CIs suggested that a dependency on the state, or an expectation that higher powers should and would provide goods and services, is a hang-over effect of the expansive social welfare system that existed in the Communist era. MCIs used the term ‘*бэлэн сэтгэлтэй*’, (*belen setgeltay*) (literally translated as ‘prepared or ready-made spirit’) to describe this phenomenon of dependency. *Belen setgeltay* was reported to influence peoples’ interactions with development projects, as MCI 1 explained:

*People here have a belen setgeltay, they are used to things being done for them. They are dependent like the Russian times when we had socialism and we were under that society for seventy years so that thought is still in people’s mind. For example, after three-years of a vegetable project a person knows how to grow, prepare, and harvest, they can do all things but they won’t. They will wait for a new project because it might give free things. People always look towards the government and people in control and ask them, ‘what should we do?’*
As this quote shows, connected with *belen setgeltay* is a normative expectation that leadership and control comes from outside powerful structures and people. For example, when asked for their ideal style of development all MCIs indicated that local people should contribute labour, knowledge, and resources but control should come from the outside. This was explained by *MCI 2*:

> There are two parts to a Mongolian’s character. One part is if they are told what they are to do, you must do this, they can then do it. The second part is if someone teaches them they can go and develop their own activities….Practice makes perfect, I think it’s better if control comes from the development agency, people cannot manage and control the project themselves, so it’s better if the control is from the development agency, we need an independent agency for control….in a project there needs to be outside control.

However, while CIs agreed communist influences remained, there were differences in beliefs as to the extent of its influence. Generally, CIs felt the older generation still held to socialist principles, while the younger generation are moving towards a more ‘Western’, democratic, individualistic cultural value set.
4.3 Results of Case Study: ‘Project A’

4.3.1 Introduction and Background to Project A

Project A is an award-winning development project working to improve herder livelihoods in nine *sums* in Mongolia. The following section will present the results based on interviews with Project A staff and local participants, which included one Development Organisational Manager (DOM), two Ulaanbaatar-based Project Managers (PM), three *aimag* Staff (AS) members, one *sum* Staff (SS) member, and four local Participants (P).

Project A is currently being implemented by the Mongolian branch of an international Christian relief, development, and advocacy organisation. This organisation has been working in Mongolia since the mid 1990s, and is one of the largest international NGOs present with an annual budget in the range of US $20 - $30 million. Project A started in 2005 and is implemented in three *aimags* and nine *sums* chosen because of their low literacy rates, large herder populations, and lack of assistance from other aid donors. The funding for the project, of US $3.7 million, was obtained from a foreign government which had made finance available to countries that had introduced or expanded free-enterprise elements in their agricultural economy.

The overall goal of Project A is to improve herder incomes and food security. To achieve this, according to project documents, Project A prioritised the selection of rural people who were located near the *sum* centre, were engaged in herding and wanted to diversify, had initiative and a positive attitude, were willing to join a cooperative or group and share their knowledge, and had the capacity to continue new initiatives after the end of the project. The project consisted of three main activities, the improvement of herder productivity, the introduction of horticultural businesses, and development of micro-enterprises. These activities were implemented through knowledge transference (seminars, workshops, peer-to-peer experience sharing) and material support (finance, animals, building materials). In addition, the project established learning centres in all target areas which were the primary conduit for project activities and provided a space for the local community to procure, share, and utilise information, skills, and experiences.

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27 This figure is for each three year phase. The project was currently entering into the first year of its second phase.
4.3.2 How did Stakeholders in Project A Understand the Concept of ‘Participation’?

4.3.2.1 The Practical Realities of Participation

Project Structure
Project A maintained a central office in the Development Organisation’s (DO) headquarters in Ulaanbaatar, regional branches in each of the three aimag centres, and then local branches in each of the sums where the project was implemented. The project site, which provided the basis for the case study consisted of five staff members in the aimag branch and two staff members at the sum branch, with 40 to 50 project participants spread throughout the sum.

Project Identification
The first step in the identification of Project A was the construction of the project proposal or ‘grant document’. This grant document was “...very general, what we want to do, our results and our goals” (PM 2), but in order to procure financial assistance it had to meet general criteria established by the funding organisation. As a result, the DO and funder, rather than the prospective local stakeholders, laid the foundation for the direction the project would take.

Project Planning and Preparation
Once funding had been secured, the project entered into a planning and preparation stage, about which staff suggested, “Local people should ideally be involved in” (PM 1). According to PM 1 in this stage, “What [project staff] actually do is collect information from the herders” in order to create the project’s logframe matrix and implementation plan. This information was collected through “widespread discussions with local people...asking them ‘what do you want to do with agriculture and business, what do you want to learn?’” (PM 2). These discussions took the form of interviews and focus groups with herders, and utilised participatory techniques such as PRA and PLA. Project staff recalled that initially it was difficult to talk with herders and facilitate meetings, as herders were ‘shy’, and differences in power existed; as PM 2 commented, “They saw our staff driving a nice big car, and viewed us as city people”. However, this reluctance to talk freely was overcome as staff established a relationship with herders, as PM 2 described:

A logframe matrix is a detailed summary of the project and shows “what the project intends to do and how, what the key assumptions are, and how the inputs and outputs will be monitored and evaluated” (AusAID, 2003, p. 1).
We first started talking about [herders] favourite things, the things that are near to their life, for example horses, at this time people start to talk. One of our ways of building relationship is between meetings we serve tea, coffee, and biscuits; after that people are more open.

In addition, participatory methods such as PRA were employed and viewed as highly successful:

We used the PRA techniques to facilitate discussions, such as timelines, maps etc. If we don’t use this people can’t participate in focus groups and they won’t say anything….After we use this method people are developing and at that time we can’t write fast enough because all people are talking about their problems like a race (PM 2).

Thus, staff were able to collect information through participatory tools, once a relationship had been established with herders.

Information was not just collected from herders, but also from local organisations, the local government, and the project’s aimag and sum staff. This information was processed and discussed together by Ulaanbaatar and aimag staff over a month-long period and resulted in the draft logframe matrix. This draft was then sent to all three prospective aimags and discussed with the aimag and sum government officials, who “…might add some ideas related to the local situation and also take off some ideas that they don’t think is appropriate” (PM 2). Finally, in light of these discussions and recommendations, the logframe was again reviewed by the project management which resulted in the final version of Project A’s logframe. Following on from the logframe, the project’s three-year implementation and monitoring schedules were created and displayed in each aimag and sum office in the form of large wall charts.

Thus, within the planning stage of Project A, the participation consisted of consultation and data extraction of a wide number of stakeholders.

29 The logframe was a rigid structure, evidenced by a three-year fixed implementation plan. In addition, project staff reported that the logframe was approved by the funder and could not be changed unless negotiation with the funder was undertaken. This had proven difficult as the funding had been procured by the DO’s international office, and hence direct communication between the Mongolia division and the funder could not occur but rather had to pass through DO’s international office.
Selection of Participants

Local people’s participation in Project A’s activities was dependent on them passing the project’s rigorous selection process, which was designed to mitigate nepotism and corruption, and enable only those who met the project’s selection criteria to participate. Project A had general selection criteria (see Section: 4.3.1), but also prioritised ‘middle income’ families. These families were chosen because they needed assistance but could also draw on their own resources (labour, finances) to make the most of the project’s activities. According to PM 2 the bulk of participants selected were to be middle income because “...if we support them they will improve,” while a small number of rich people were chosen because “rich people are hardworking people, so we choose rich people in order to be an example to the poorer people.” In addition, people who were motivated by learning rather than material benefits were desired, as PM 2 said “We check do [people] just want to have free things...are they just greedy...or do they really want to learn.”

Participant selection was a multi-staged process of checking local peoples’ backgrounds against the selection criteria, as PM 2 commented, “We think again and again and we repeatedly check.” Initial information about the project was distributed during the Nadaam festival while countryside people were gathered in large numbers at sum centres. Next bag meetings were organised and the project specifics, such as the budget, goals, aims, and selection criteria, were introduced to local people. However, according to project staff, in initial meetings the project’s material benefits, such as finances, were not disclosed but hidden until the end of workshops in order to ensure people were participating for the ‘correct’ reasons. At a second bag meeting local people gathered and openly discussed the good and bad points, ideas, and merits of those who had registered an interested in participating and voted on who should enter the project.

The eight successful candidates from each bag were interviewed by a sum selection council which consisted of local government representatives, project staff, and a delegation of herders from each bag. During the interviews prospective participants were asked questions about their ideas, motivations, and backgrounds. In addition, personal information was checked against government records and project staff made house calls to gather further information. Successful candidates from the sum then had a final interview at the aimag selection council, and if successful, were invited to participate in the project and presented with an official certificate of participation.
The selection process was perceived as being long and difficult by both staff and participants, as PM 2 noted “some people don’t like the [selection process], they said we are not criminals we just want to participate in the project.”

*Project Activities*

Once selected for the project, local people participated within the project’s step-by-step structure. Firstly, participants attained knowledge by attending seminars and practical workshops and then formed groups. These groups, which acted as the project’s unit of participation, were organised and controlled by both internal and external forces. Support from the project was given once groups had formulated an idea and a written proposal.

Knowledge dissemination formed the foundation of the project; hence, initially local participants were required to attend seminars and workshops on agriculture, business and basic life skills which lasted up to three days each time. These seminars and workshops were taught by project staff, outside experts, and successful participants. This attendance was mandated in a contract between local people and the project, and monitored by project staff. However, different interpretations of this contract existed, for example, PM 2 stated, “If the individual misses a lesson they can no longer participate in the project,” whilst aimag and sum staff reported if participants missed occasional lessons they would remain in the project.

The formation of groups was required by the project, as finance and material resources were primarily given to groups rather than individuals. To facilitate this, prior to group formation, the project provided seminars and information on group work and cooperation. As a result, groups acted as the unit of implementation and became the dominating participatory structure in the project. Project staff reported that groups were used within the project so that larger investments could reach the community and therefore have a greater impact on people’s lives. Furthermore, SS 1, a former herder, reported that groups were also an idea of herders who understood group work to be more efficient and “…were tired and weary of living one-by-one.”

The majority of groups were organised internally by participants themselves, with the project occasionally externally organising participants into groups. Groups\(^{30}\) were either formed

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\(^{30}\) In the four groups observed, membership consisted of three, four, five, and eight individuals. Two of these groups were based on kinship ties, and two were formed around a common interest. All four groups were organised without the project’s direct intervention.
along relational lines (kinship or friendship) or by participants with a common interest. Typically, groups had between three to eight members, although in practice membership consisted of the family unit rather than the individual participant. This meant groups had a rotating, flexible membership, as families could send different family members to participate in group activities dependent on availability and work tasks. Furthermore, from interviews and observations it appeared that groups where members lived close to each other, were of a similar age, held similar interests, and had significant relational bond were the most successful.

In practical terms the participation of group members in group activities was controlled both externally by the project framework and staff and internally by group leaders. Firstly, the project as well as providing the incentive, organisational structure and knowledge for groups to form, also established a contract with the groups. This investment contract stipulated the day-to-day operations of the group, for example, “If you receive seeds or animals you should use it like this and do that etc – this sort of contract” (PM 2). Furthermore, project staff routinely visited groups to monitor the equality of group participation and check whether groups were using resources in accordance with their proposal documents. As PM 2 stated:

We meet the group members first, not the leader. For example, if we give a tractor to one group we ask the members about it, are you using it, who uses it a lot, do you have any problems…we ask very detailed questions from them and then we can see if they are telling the truth or not.

In this way project staff helped to settle any group disputes and encouraged equal participation within group work and equal access to the capital resource.

Group participation was also controlled by group leaders, who, according to staff and local participants, were elected to their role by group members. Of the four groups observed, all leaders held, or had held, positions of leadership within the community. For example, in the non-kin-based groups one leader was a local government official, and the other a small-business owner, while in kin-based groups both leaders were senior members of the kinship network. Staff and local people reported that within the group, participation was controlled by oral contracts between members based on rules provided by the project. However, some local people revealed that the group’s activities were determined by the leader rather than a participatory decision-making process involving all members of the group.
Once groups had been formed they developed proposals for support from the project, such as business and agricultural plans, and livestock requests\(^{31}\) which fell within Project A’s framework. For example, the four groups observed had received three pigs, a tractor, materials to build a greenhouse and cold store, and finances to start a block building business. These requests then passed through the project’s management chain. Firstly, such requests were collected by \textit{sum} staff, then collated and processed at the \textit{aimag} office and then sent to the central office in Ulaanbaatar where they were analysed and the final decision to approve requests were granted. Once sourced, materials, animals and finance were then supplied\(^{32}\) to groups by \textit{sum} staff. Then, following this, \textit{aimag} and \textit{sum} staff routinely visited groups to encourage participants and carry out ‘monitoring’ of resource use and group function.

4.3.2.2 Theoretical Understandings of Participation

\textit{Project Staff – ‘Participation within a Top-Down Company Structure’}

The Staff of Project A understood the project as a top-down company model; hence local participation would occur in this context. This meant the project provided a space of employment for local people, with local participation seen as the services required to gain material benefits or ‘wages’. As a result, staff understood their general role to be management, controlling and directing the company and its employees – the local participants.

Staff defined participation as the ‘active involvement’\(^{33}\) of local people within the project. This ‘active’ participation meant local people’s primary role was to contribute information and labour to the project. Furthermore, a number of staff mentioned that this ‘active involvement’ of local people was the basis of a ‘development’ project, compared to a ‘relief’ project in which local people were ‘passive’ recipients of materials such as flour, rice, etc.

During the project’s planning stage, staff saw ‘active involvement’ as contributions of information (described as ideas, suggestions and feedback) from local people and organisations. As a result, staff understood that their role was to listen and facilitate the collection of this information, \textit{“We wish 100% participation and encourage people to participate and listen to their voice….We need to listen and facilitate discussion”} (DOM 1).

\(^{31}\) In all four of the groups observed the group leader wrote the proposal.

\(^{32}\) Groups were not required to pay back any material and financial resources to the project unless they were not being used as outlined in their proposals.

\(^{33}\) Mongolian – ‘идэвхтэй оролцох’
Furthermore, all information during the project was to be gathered by sum and aimag staff and then passed on to management staff in Ulaanbaatar.

As a method of information collection, local participation was therefore seen as a tool by project staff. This tool provided information to assist project management in the decision-making processes. As the following quotes illustrate it was clearly understood by all staff that final decisions regarding direction of the project were to be made by staff, while local people needed to be provided an opportunity to influence such decisions:

*From the outside it's always better to be defining the needs, solutions and option, what is achievable and what is not. At certain stages local people need to be involved in the process....Sometimes we [project staff] just need to make a decision; they [local people] can't do everything. For me there should be a balance between top-down and bottom-up...within a certain timeframe we want to provide them with participation. (PM 1)*

*Local* people monitor and analyse their situation, then make a decision so they can say their decision to [project staff] who make the decision for them....We have to hear people’s voice to make any decision about the community and the area. (AS 3)

Furthermore, during implementation, ‘active involvement’ was understood as group labour, a tool essential for the project’s success. As SS stated, *“We said to the herders, it is profitable for people to work together, one person’s power can’t reach anything. If you are working together you can create big things.”*

Ulaanbaatar and aimag staff verbalised the link between participation and empowerment. Empowerment was to occur through decision making, as PM stated, *“Participation is owning the process of development. Empowerment comes through participation. Empowerment is actually decision making”*. Local decision-making however was at all stages controlled by project. For example, during planning local decisions would assist management in designing the project, whilst in implementation local decisions about business or agricultural plans had to fit within the project’s framework and be approved by management. Therefore, according to staff understandings, empowerment of local people arose from decision-making which was controlled by an outside source.
According to staff, the project’s role was similar to that of a company. The project was viewed as the provider of both resources (knowledge and materials), and control (information, the selection of participants, and group work). Acting like a company the project provided a space for employment, by providing a ‘wage’ (resources) in return for ‘services’ (information and group work). Meanwhile, project staff, as group monitors and final decision-makers, directed and controlled workers. Furthermore, such a top-down model of participation fitted within the Mongolian characteristic of ‘looking to the outside’, as the following quotation illustrates:

People can’t work because they don’t have support from within Mongolia….So people go to foreign projects….The people are looking towards foreign peoples’ hands. If someone tells them to do it – they will do it. The idea ‘I have to do it’ it is in people’s minds but they can’t move their own hands. We [the project] tell people you can do it, so they start to do it. In general, Mongolian people are waiting for outside people’s mouths to move them. (PM 2)

Project staff’s self-identified roles provided evidence that local participation was understood to occur within a top-down structure. As local supervisors, sum staff needed a close working relationship with local participants, “We have local staff in the sum in order to have a deep relationship with herders” (AS 2). This enabled sum staff to collect information by facilitating participatory discussions; select the correct participants; and monitor and control group work. Aimag staff, as middle management, collected and processed (analysing, summarising and making conclusions) information from the sum regions before sending it to UB. In addition, aimag staff were to establish a relationship with the local government to ensure their participation. UB staff as project managers received information, and used it to undertake the overall planning, control and monitoring of the project, and therefore gave direction to the aimag branches.

Local, national, and international institutions were also understood by project staff as participating in the project. Firstly, local organisations and the local and national branches of government were consulted during planning stages and participated by contributing information, advice and feedback to project staff. As PM 2 stated “It needs to be community participation, so we have to include local groups and local government in decision-making.” In addition, the project used the local government’s local knowledge to assist in the selection of participants. As a result, the project controlled and directed institutional participation.
However, to some extent the funding agency controlled the participation of project staff and therefore acted as a not-so silent partner of the company. For example, management staff acknowledged that all project activities occurred within a general framework which was either determined or approved by the project’s funder.

Local People – ‘Participation Within the Project’s Framework’
Local people’s understandings of participation in Project A arose from the framework provided for them by the project, that is a top-down company structure. Thus, in response to the project’s emphasis, local people understood their participation to revolve around groups, as P 1 stated “I knew that if I participate in the project I have to work in a group.” In addition, participation occurred within project-directed activities of attending seminars, and writing proposals. Furthermore, local people understood that working hard was the critical attribute of participation, “The most important thing is that people are capable of working well” (P 2).

Local people viewed participation as a tool to access the material benefits of the project. As a result, local people saw themselves as employees who in exchanges for their participation in project activities (seminars, proposals, and group work) received ‘wages’ such as financial assistance and materials from the project. Local people were extremely grateful for their wages with all interviewees echoing P 3’s comment, “From the project we received a lot of finance. We are very happy – it seems to us we want to carry the [DO’s] flag.”

During interviews and casual conversation local people readily identified control and decision-making as coming from the project. After prompting, local people described decisions they made, such as joining the project, attending seminars, and formulating proposals. However, all these decisions were made within a framework defined and also controlled by the project. Thus, decision-making reflected a top-down company whereby employees are not expected or encouraged (by themselves or management) to make decisions regarding the company’s overall direction.

Although not specifically verbalised, notions of empowerment arising from participation in Project A were evident within interviews with local people. For example, although the final decision for support was with project management local people were proud of creating their own proposals, as P2 reported:
I chose the pigs….The pigs were my idea. When I wrote the business plan I researched a lot – nowadays all food has become expensive – so my relatives discussed this and we chose the pig. The pig eats everything. The project staff told me to take the chickens – but I was afraid to take the chickens – because chickens need special food and also they require a lot of care.

Local participants also passed their knowledge and experiences on to others either informally or formally as teacher/trainers for the project, as P 1 stated “In general I have knowledge about vegetables. Now I help other people who don’t have such knowledge a lot”. In addition, the majority of local participants expressed hope and plans for the future outside the boundaries of the project. For example P 1, who is no longer receiving finance or support from the project, stated:

We shouldn’t say we aren’t going to do anything because we have finished the project, we should continue to work….I am now building a second greenhouse by myself…. I am now interested in chickens. I am preparing a sorter and am thinking about asking people to build me a chicken hatch.

As a result, notions of empowerment arose from local people making choices within the framework of Project A, rather than project-leading decisions.

Local participants principally identified the project’s role as provision, organisation, and selection. Firstly, as a provider, the project supplied local people with employment through the provision of knowledge, and financial and material resources, as P 2 commented, “In this project they give us everything we need.” Secondly, the project organised people into groups and group work. Lastly, the project was viewed as a selector, as the following quote from P 2 illustrates:

The project chooses families who are really able to work and can work – they won’t choose families who can’t do anything….Also the project gives vegetables and animals to people – some people eat these and some people use them to grow their herd size and to grow vegetables. The project only chooses the families who would use these resources and not eat them….they chose our family to participate as we are hard working.
However, as the quote also shows, the project selected only ‘worthy’ participants classified as those who had the capacity to work hard and make it through to the end of the project.

Local people did not recount the role of staff other than those at the Sum level or make mention of the local government’s role in the project. Sum staff, were described as the project’s representative in sum, with a role of the intermediary controller of participation. Sum staff were seen to control local participation by using their local knowledge to select participants capable of being successful in the project. In addition, Sum staff monitored local participation within project activities (seminars and group work) and hence exerted control. Local people also conceptualised Sum staff as the gateway through which requests passed to project management in Ulaanbaatar, and decisions and financial benefits returned. Thus, Sum staff had morphed into company supervisors, controlling and monitoring employee participation and acting as a bridge between management and workers.

4.3.2.3 The Language of Participation
Within Project A specific English and Mongolian words and phrases were used to describe elements of participation. This ‘language of participation’ reflected both the practical realities and theoretical understandings of stakeholders in Project A.

_Devlopment Organisation Terminology_

The policy documents of the DO which implemented Project A contain phrases and language indicating higher-levels of local participation are standard practice within its projects. The DO employs the ‘community participation approach’ to bring about ‘transformation’ and ‘empowerment’ to poor communities. Within this approach the poor are viewed as ‘active participants, not passive participants’ and as ‘partners’, meaning the poor ‘share in project leadership, responsibilities and activities right from the start’ and ‘drive the development objectives and processes’. The role of the poor in decision-making combined with the DO’s promise to ‘not impose its solutions, resources, interventions, and values on the community’ would bring about ‘community empowerment’. Finally, participation was seen to arise from a moral imperative, rather than from an economic standpoint alone, as the DO ‘yielded autonomy’ within projects for ‘the common good’

_‘Participation’_
Project staff, local participants and project documents most commonly used the term ‘оролцох’ (ohrulzokh) to describe the role of local people in the project. _Ohrulzokh_ is
translated as ‘to attend, participate, take part in, to be included’ (Global Dictionary, (n.d.)). The term ‘хамрах’ (hamrakh), translated as ‘to include, involve, affect, embrace’ (Global Dictionary, (n.d.)) was also used interchangeably, but with less frequency, than оhrulzokh. The two terms оhrulzokh and hamrakh, just like their English equivalents, participation and involvement, are common words within the Mongolian language used to describe everyday activities. As such, оhrulzokh and hamrakh do not automatically awaken notions of decision-making, ownership, or leading within the local participant’s consciousness.

The term ‘идэвхтэй’ (idekhtie), which means ‘to be active or lively’ (Global Dictionary, (n.d.)), was frequently used in conjunction with the terms оhrulzokh and hamrakh. The local participant’s role was therefore often described as ‘идэвхтэй оролцоо’ (idekhtei оhrulzokh). For example a project document stated ‘төслийн бүх үйл ажиллагаанд идэвхтэй оролцогч байх’ which means ‘participants are to actively participate in all project work and activities’. Its high-frequency usage strongly suggests that the term idekhtie was used within Mongolia’s communist rhetoric. This theory was given evidence by a staff member in Project A who recalled being a member of the Mongolian Revolutionary Youth League “…which always talked about ‘active involvement’ (idekhtei оhrulzokh)” which was “…kind of a speak out against being lazy” (PM 2).

‘Empowerment’

Within interviews, two Ulaanbaatar managers and one aimag staff talked about empowerment, using the term ‘чадваржуулж’ (chadvarjoohlaj) for ‘empowerment’. Cha*dvarjoohlaj translates as ‘to gain in confidence, or capacity; or to become more capable’ (Global Dictionary, (n.d.)). This term, however, was not used by local participants and was not widespread in usage among staff outside of Ulaabaatar, as one aimag staff member commented, “Chadvarjoohlaj – I know it’s in the vision statement, but I really don’t know what it means” (AS 3).

‘Groups’

In project A groups were the dominating participatory structure. These groups were most commonly referred to as ‘булэг’ (bulag) which translates as ‘group, detachment, faction, or chapter’ (Global Dictionary). Within interviews and documents qualifying adjectives were commonly placed in front of the term bulag. Some of these adjectives helped describe the function of the group, for example ‘малчдын булэг’ (herder group) and ‘хоршоо булэг’
(small business group), while others, such as ‘нөхөрлөө бүлэг’ (friendship group) ‘элэгсэ бүлэг’ (intimate group), and ‘нэгдмэлийг бүлэг’ (united group) described group ideology.

According to PM 2 the words ‘нэгдэл’ (negdel) and ‘хоршоо’ (Khorshoo) can be used to describe groups; however, these words were strongly associated with Mongolia’s past:

During the negdel and khorshoo there was no trust at this time. At first during socialism there was the negdel and then later on during the 1990s was the khorshoo. Then the khorshoo disappeared, so if we use these terms and talk about the khorshoo it’s difficult for us – people don’t trust these words. When we talk about the khorshoo most of the herdsmen think it’s a bore and more of a nuisance, they don’t think it’s anything special.

As a result, Project A intentionally did not use the terms negdel and khorshoo, but rather used the generic term for group, bulag, with descriptors to add further meaning.

4.3.3 What did Stakeholders in Project A Perceive as the Benefits of Participation?

4.3.3.1 Stakeholder Perceptions of the Benefits of Project A

This section will provide an overview of the benefits of participation in Project A for local people (see Table: 2), and the benefits for non-local people (see Table: 3) as understood by project staff and local participants. Project staff readily identified both tangible and intangible benefits during interviews and conversations. However, Ulaanbaatar-based managers talked predominantly about intangible benefits, while aimag and sum staff talked about both equally. Initially, local participants only identified the material and financial benefits of the project and were confused when asked questions about intangible benefits. Nevertheless, through indirect questions and casual conversations a number of intangible benefits were highlighted.

34 The terms ‘материалыг биш’ and ‘биет бус’ were used as translations for intangible.
4.3.3.1.1 Local Benefits

Table 2: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Benefits of Project A for Local People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 5)</th>
<th>Local Participants (n = 4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangibles – Material and Finance (5)</td>
<td>Tangibles – Material and Finance (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge/Mental Investment (5)</td>
<td>Knowledge/Mental Investment (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Esteem/Changed Mindset (5)</td>
<td>Self Esteem/Changed Mindset (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Connections (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working in Groups (2)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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**Tangibles – Material and Finance**

All staff and local participants interviewed recognised the immediate tangible benefits the project brought to the local participants and their families. These tangible benefits were listed as finances or materials including tractors, seeds, tools, better quality livestock, animals, greenhouse and cold-store supplies, and fields. Furthermore, the end result of project activities was seen in the terms of two tangible outcomes, increased income levels and improved livelihoods.

**Knowledge/Mental Investment**

Knowledge, also referred to as ‘mental investment’, was identified by all interviewees as an intangible benefit of the project. The broad benefit of knowledge was further narrowed to practical knowledge – how to grow vegetables –, life skills – literacy and numeracy –, and business knowledge – how to research and write a business proposal.

Local participants identified the project’s workshops and seminars, as the source of knowledge, pointing out that these were active and practical and hence useful and enjoyable. For example, P 4 commented, “When [staff] were teaching the lesson they showed us by examples, and they prepared the materials themselves...people didn’t drop out of the lessons because all people were actively participating in the lesson.” Meanwhile, staff suggested that participants also gained knowledge from the experience-sharing that occurred both formally in workshops and seminars, and informally in group situations.

Staff noted that non-participants could also access the project’s knowledge and therefore also benefitted. Firstly, non-participants, through everyday community interactions, learned from participants. Secondly, recent alterations to the project’s structure meant non-participants...
could now attend project seminars. In addition, one-third of a group’s members could now be non-participants; hence, peer-to-peer, or participant-to-non-participant, knowledge transference could take place within group activities.

**Self Esteem/Changed Mindset**

All staff and participants, in some form or another, mentioned benefits, such as an increased self-esteem or changed mindset, which fit within definitions of empowerment. All staff reported that participants had lost their shyness and could now speak freely with each other and outsiders, “Now project beneficiaries are not shy – they want to express their opinions” (PM 2). In addition, staff noted that “Participants’ minds have changed, their minds are getting bigger...[they] now all have different ideas and opinions” (PM 2). Furthermore, staff commented that successful participants had become teacher/trainers for the project and were seen as “role models in the community” (PM 1).

For participants, as they continued on in project-derived livelihood strategies, self esteem rose, as P 4, having recently exited the project, noted:

*There is a difference between before and after the project. I learned how to plant seeds and now we grow vegetables and have food to eat without having to beg from someone. Before I was just staying at home – but now I have work to do.*

For other local participants, being in the project had changed their mindset, highlighted by P 1’s comments:

*We shouldn’t say we aren’t going to do anything because we have left the project. We should continue to do things and work....I learned one thing from participating in this project, with a business plan I can take money from any organisation....Next year I will write a business plan with the aim to take some chickens.*

Because of this growth in self esteem and changed mindset local people had increased hope as they had been encouraged by their experiences in the project to formulate future plans and ideas.

**Social Connections**

Staff reported that participants’ social connections had both increased and improved, within and beyond their level in society, due to participating in the project. As herders, participants
were often living in isolated circumstances; hence, project activities provided them with the opportunity to gather together with other herders, meet new people, and renew old acquaintances. Specifically, it was project seminars that provided a space for these herder-to-herder connections to occur, as PM 1 recalled:

\[
\text{[Participants] spend quite a bit of time together as students sitting in the courses. So during that time they get to know each other better….From this they are quite selective on who their [group] partners are going to be.}
\]

As this quote illustrates increased social connections with other herders meant groups could be formed based on deeper knowledge of member characteristics and strengthened bonds of trust. The increased social connectivity in turn fostered participation, as by the end of the seminars participants themselves had begun to “...encourage those who are shy to speak and try to include them in discussions, and try to open up some people from within” (SS 1). Meanwhile, these social connections were further strengthened by the regular interactions involved with group work.

During the project local participants also learned how to interact with people who were higher on the social order. As PM 2 explained:

\[
\text{After the [project staff] go to the countryside and organise meetings [participants] learn how to speak systematically. They learn how to speak to a doctor and how to speak to a politician, what is the correct way to speak….[The project] teaches people how to speak at meetings, before they don’t like to speak at meetings so they wouldn’t talk.}
\]

Therefore, meetings and seminars also provided participants with the opportunity to learn and experience how to talk, voice one’s opinion appropriately, and therefore connect with other classes of society. Furthermore, different sectors of the local community were brought together during the project’s activities; thus, connections beyond class boundaries were possible, for example herder-to-government officials, and herder-to-project staff.

**Groups**

Group work was not just viewed as a project directive, but also as a benefit, by staff members. This is because during seminars and project-directed group work, participants learned how to
work together and saw the profitability of group work. As a result, according to staff, around a half of the groups continued to work together once their time in the project had elapsed.

4.3.3.1.2 Non-Local Beneficiaries

Table 3: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Non-Local Beneficiaries of Project A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 5)</th>
<th>Local Participants (n = 4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project A Staff (4)</td>
<td>Local Government (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of staff mentioned the benefits that they had received from working for the DO. These benefits included the work skills and knowledge gained from a job with a development organisation, “I have learnt a lot from Project A and am still learning” (AS 1). Moreover, as all official reports and talks with foreign experts were undertaken in English, a major benefit for managers was the increased opportunities to hone their English skills. According to OM 1, “[Staff] leave with good skills, such as English, so they can easily find a job with other government and international NGOs.” In addition, staff mentioned that although work was very difficult at times, they gained great satisfaction in seeing people’s lives improved, “My work is a big investment for me. It’s great to see people’s lives improving” (PM 2).

A small number of interviewees also identified the local government as benefiting from Project A. In a positive light the local government benefited as increased income flowed into the community from the project’s activities, while government officials also improved their capacity and standing in the community from working alongside the project. However, in a negative light it was reported that during electioneering “Some local governors take credit for the [project] work….At bag meetings the governor would often say he did the work, but it’s the project’s work” (PM 2).

4.3.3.2 Stakeholder Priorities of Local Benefits in Project A

Project Staff

Staff identified increased incomes and improved livelihoods of herders as the goal, and hence the priority benefit of the project. This main benefit was understood to transpire through the provision of both mental and material capital to project participants (see Figure: 4). As a result, the second tier of benefits was knowledge and skills (mental capital), and finances and materials (material capital).
Staff placed equal importance on knowledge and skills, and the financial and material resources that participants received. It was understood that only when both of these two benefits existed could the main benefit be realised. This relationship was described in the following quotes:

*As for this project we want to improve the herders’ knowledge and skills on the relative topics. But we also provide them with investment so they can apply the skills that they have learned. (PM 1)*

*Our aim is like the old saying ‘don’t give a man a fish but teach him how to fish etc’ But if someone learns the way to do business but doesn’t have any money in their pocket it’s difficult so we also help [participants] with this problem – we give them support.... First we give them training and later we give them materials. (PM 2)*

As the quotes illustrate, staff acknowledged that the timing of these benefits was critical. Firstly, participants received knowledge and skills, then following this financial support and materials were provided so that this mental seed could ‘bear fruit’. As such, staff acknowledged that in isolation neither mental capital nor material capital alone were able to provide participants with sustainable benefits of increased income and improved livelihoods.

**Figure 4: Staff Priorities of the Benefits of Project A**

Local Participants
Local participants clearly identified the main benefits of participation as the finances and materials given to them directly from the project (see Figure: 5). This was evident throughout
the interviews, when the majority of local participants talked freely about the financial and material support they had taken from the project, while talk of the other ‘sub-benefits’ only arose out of significant prompting. For participants, the sub-benefits ‘workshops and seminars’ were identified first and then linked to knowledge and skills; for example P1 stated “Training is useful for our lives. After we attend the training we learn a lot of things.” Furthermore, workshops and seminars were also prioritised because attending seminars was the only way in which participants could gain access to the finances and materials given to participants. Meanwhile, the end tangible benefits of increased incomes and improved livelihoods, being less immediate and palpable than project-sourced finances and materials, were therefore seen as ‘sub benefits’.

**Figure 5: Local Participants’ Priorities of the Benefits of Project A**

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**Results of a Difference in Priorities**

The project, due to staff and local people having different priorities of benefits, faced some difficulties during the early stages of implementation. Staff understood that local participants prioritised and expected gifts of material benefits from the project, as AS2 noted, “When we started talking about the project with [local] people they understood that we will give them material benefits.” However, staff prioritising knowledge, initially sought to hide the material benefits from participants, telling them “If you choose our project, you are involved only in training and we can’t give you anything” (AS2). Additionally, as the entry point for the project, staff wanted to select participants who prioritised knowledge; for example AS2 stated “Some people ask, ‘If we sit in the training what financial benefits will you give me?’...these
people we don’t want to participate.” Furthermore, staff felt that thoughts of future material benefits might distract local participants during seminars. As PM 2 summarised:

First we hide the benefits and then after the training we tell [participants] about the benefits. If we tell them about the benefits before the training people just think that all they need to do is just come to the seminar and they will receive benefits, then they will think of other things, like how they will use the materials while they are at the workshops, or they will sleep.

Thus, the project’s initial participants could not see the material benefits of the project and became “…tired and fed up with all the workshops...and dropped out” (PM 2). Furthermore, the project had a policy that “people must attend all seminars” (PM 2) or they would be deleted from the project. PM 2 described the resulting situation:

In the first year people dropped out all the time. We took measures to pull people into the project, so we gave people make-up lessons to try and catch up. If we didn’t take these measures we wouldn’t have had any participants.

However, after these initial participants attended the seminars and received the material benefits from the project, local people’s attitudes towards the projects and seminar attendance changed. As PM 2 recalled, “After we gave [material] benefits to the participants, the people who left the project and also those who are not participating said to [project staff] we want to attend the workshops again, we want to participate now.” Thus, herder priorities of material benefits are a cause of ‘wait-and-see’ approaches or ‘risk-aversion’ strategies.
4.3.4 Which Factors Influenced Participation within Project A?

4.3.4.1 Reasons Local People Participated in Project A

Table 4: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Reasons Local People Participated in Project A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 5)</th>
<th>Local Participants (n = 4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immediate Tangible Benefits (5)</td>
<td>Immediate Tangible Benefits (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership (5)</td>
<td>Leadership (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information (3)</td>
<td>Peer Encouragement/ (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workshops and Seminars (Content) (2)</td>
<td>Workshops and Seminars (Method) (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Work (2)</td>
<td>Project Focus Areas (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Immediate Tangible Benefits

All interviewees indicated that the immediate tangible benefits of finance and materials were the main reason why local people participated in Project A. Staff reported that local people were initially cautious, “Their approach is ‘okay, let’s just wait-and-see’” (PM 1). However, local people joined the project once they could see that the project supplied finance and material resources. As PM 2 stated, “All people observe the first participants….If [the project] is good then they enter.” Staff also suggested that the major reason why local people formed groups was to receive finance or large material resources from the project, “[People] only want to work in groups when finance comes, then during other times they don’t want to work together” (AS 1).

Local participants reported that immediate tangible benefits were the main reason they joined the project, as the following responses to the question, ‘Why are you involved?’ highlight:

Firstly, I heard that the project will give vegetables...and animals to people. (P 4)

I chose it because they give the money for whatever we need – whatever is important for us. (P 3)

Meanwhile, Project A was also chosen because its benefits were better than other projects on offer. P 1 made this point clear:
The main reason I became involved in [Project A] is that I can’t buy materials for the greenhouse. In [Project A] all materials came from the DO and we just have to pay for water and the mixing of mud. Recently in our sum a project came from Canada. They are teaching business training, then the participants write a business plan – and then the project gives them a discount loan. I went to their seminars, but I didn’t go to the last day because I am not interested in getting a loan…. [In Project A] the finance is good and we don’t have to give the money back!

As this quote shows, with its gifts of finance and materials rather than loans, for local people, Project A was worth the required investments of time, energy, and resources. Thus, Project A was seen as a provider, as P 1 exclaimed, “They give us everything apart from our hands,\(^{35}\)” but of primarily immediate tangible benefits.

**Leadership**

Both staff and local participants indicated that it was partly the project’s leadership which brought about participation in Project A. Firstly, this leadership began during the selection phase when the project determined which local people would participate in the project. Secondly, project staff both encouraged and monitored local participants’ attendance at seminars and workshops. Thirdly, the project was seen to provide the ideas, knowledge, and courage which enabled local people to write business plans. Fourthly, the project monitored and controlled group work, and as a leader provided an outside source of direction and control so that groups could function. As this quote shows, according to PM 2, Mongolian people desired and needed outside facilitation:

\[\text{[Mongolian] people are looking towards foreign peoples’ hands. If someone tells them to do it – they will do it. The idea ‘I have to do it’ it is in people’s minds but they can’t move their own hands. [The project] tells people, ‘you can do it’, so they start to do it. In general, Mongolian people are waiting for outside people’s mouths to move them.}\]

As a result, local people were attracted to the project and participated due to its leadership in the form of top-down management.

**Workshops and Seminars**

Staff and local participants both identified the workshops and seminars as a reason why locals participated in Project A. Staff believed it was primarily the content, i.e. the knowledge given,

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\(^{35}\) Mongolian idiom ‘гараас бусдыг өгөх’.
in the seminars and workshops which caused local people to remain in the project. In contrast, local participants primarily reported that it was the method by which training and seminars were conducted that kept them involved. Firstly, local participants pointed out workshops and seminars were pragmatic, containing examples and practical demonstrations. Furthermore, participants also appreciated the atmosphere in which they were carried out, as P 2 commented:

_The project people serve us tea, coffee, and biscuits and people who participates really like this….they will give all people a pen and notebook. After the harvest we have a celebration party together._

Therefore, the method of knowledge transference, which included hospitality and celebrations prioritised in Mongolian culture, was important because it encouraged the formation of relationships amongst participants and also with teachers.

**Information**

According to staff, Project A disseminated detailed information to a large number of rural people which brought about their participation. In order to do this, the project advertised “during national holidays like Naadam[^36] when countryside people gather in the centre of the sum” (PM 2). Staff reported that providing detailed information meant local people did not have false expectations which prevented them from dropping out of the project. For example, AS 2 stated:

_One specific thing in our organisation is that when we first start to work we explain[^37] our work….First we explain to the poor people a lot about our project….We said to them, ‘This is the training and seminars we will organise.’ So people said ‘okay, okay, we can attend those workshops’….they agreed to attend the seminars and signed their names. As a result there was no problem with people dropping out of the workshops._

However, it was reported later on in the interview with AS 2 that some local participants still dropped out.

[^36]: Naadam is a three-day sports festival in July, and the largest gathering of countryside people in the year.
[^37]: The Mongolian word ‘ухуулах’ was used here. This word can also mean ‘to agitate, propagandize, make understand’ (Global Dictionary, n.d.).
Peer Encouragement/Information Sharing

During interviews with local participants it became apparent that the majority had gathered information from peers, which encouraged them to join the project. These peers consisted of friends, relatives, and community members – which included the local staff. \( P \, 1 \) described her reasons for joining the project as follows:

> Our sum has one well and we have owned it for the last seven years. When people were carrying water they were talking about the training….So I asked the project staff when she came to the well, ’What is the purpose of the project?’ They answered me with clear answers…I asked about vegetables and they said, ’We have that’. So I decided to participate in the project.

In addition, staff also suggested that peer encouragement, from gathering visual information occurred, as \( AS \, 2 \) commented:

> [Local] people are changing their attitude because they can now see our project’s results from looking at the participants. Our participants are working well so people will come to the workshops. It doesn’t depend on whether our training is good or not – it depends on the work of the participants.

Therefore, once local people could visually see the project’s results in their peers’ lives they were encouraged to join the project.

Project Focus Areas

Local participants reported that Project A’s focus on agriculture, horticulture and small business activities was useful for herders and hence a reason why they participated in the project. For example, \( P \, 3 \) described his reasons for joining as follows:

> There are a lot of different projects. But [Project A] is different than others, it is close to people…they are doing things that we herders need for our livelihood. For example, if I didn’t have the small tractor I couldn’t break in the new field.

Additionally, local participants often held an interest in activities specific to the project prior to the project, as \( P \, 4 \) stated, ”When I was in Ulaanbaatar I saw a greenhouse and thought it was nice – but we never thought we could do it ourselves.” Furthermore, the knowledge and skills gained were applicable to herder’s lives, as \( P \, 1 \) stated, ”Training is useful for our
lives…we learn a lot of things. Some people didn’t know how to [preserve] and eat cucumber – now we can eat cucumber in a lot of ways.”

**Group Work**

Staff suggested that the opportunity to work in groups was a reason why local people joined and continued to participate in the project. For instance, SS 1 reported:

_The idea of groups comes from herders. Before all families lived every where one-by-one. I was one of them....Then they realised that it is important for two or three families to be together. They understood their activities are more efficient and productivity is higher than one family. They really wanted to work together because they said that they had grown tired and were weary of being one-by-one._

During interviews, however, participants did not indicate that group work attracted them to the project, but simply saw group work as a project directive. In addition, it was suggested by a staff member and a participant that group work was now needed due to the environmental degradation and poverty in rural regions.

**4.3.4.2 Barriers to Participation in Project A**

Staff and local participants’ perceptions of the general barriers to participation in Project A differed significantly (See Table: 5). Project staff identified a broad scope of barriers, based on their wide experiences within Project A. In contrast, local participants, based in a single project locality, identified a narrower range of barriers. Furthermore, the local participants interviewed had overcome obstacles to participation and hence their understandings of barriers were further narrowed. As a result of these differences, staff and local participants’ perceptions of barriers will be presented separately.
### Table 5: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Barriers to Participation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 6)</th>
<th>Local Participants (n = 4)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance (6)</td>
<td>Selection Criteria (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Flow (6)</td>
<td>Poverty (4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project Structure and Staff (6)</td>
<td>Project Experiences (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Problems of Local People (4)</td>
<td>Personal Problems of Local People (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust (4)</td>
<td>Environmental Degradation (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and Historical Factors (4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations not Realised (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other – Literacy (2), Government (2), Gender (1),</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental Degradation (1)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.3.4.2.1 Project Staff

**Distance**

The large geographical distances indicative to Mongolia was the major barrier to participation according to project staff for a number of reasons. Firstly, as herders often lived far away from the *sum* and *bag* centres they were unable to attend project meetings and seminars. Secondly, information regarding the project did not always reach the most isolated herders. Thirdly, as the distance between herders is so large, herders were not accustomed to establishing relationships and communicating with outsiders, as PM 2 stated:

*In the countryside all families live everywhere, one ravine has one family and they speak only to people from the same countryside, herdsmen and neighbours. When they meet a foreign person they are afraid, and think ‘Am I saying what is correct’....In the countryside peoples’ social life is limited because they don’t have a relationship with anyone for a long time so they have almost forgotten how.*

Thus, large distances were also the foundation from which other barriers have stemmed.

**Information Flow**

Project staff suggested that sufficient information about the project does not always reach rural people. The main reason given for this was poor communication infrastructure; for example, there are no telecommunication services (landline or cell phone) or postal networks beyond the *sum* centre, whilst television and radio services are also limited.
The most experienced staff member interviewed suggested there was an acceptance within Mongolian society that information does not need to flow to rural people from authoritarian structures. This phenomenon was connected to the history of Mongolia, as PM 2 explained:

There is an old saying ‘To turn over the cauldron’, which is a thought from the Manchu period. The Manchu kings governed Mongolian countryside and managed all the information that came in and out of the country – just like an overturned cauldron resting over Mongolia nothing could come in or out. The benefit of this is that Mongolia kept its traditional customs and didn’t absorb the Manchu customs. However, now managers and bosses are applying the same method in Mongolia and not letting any information come to people – so [these people] can’t change.

Furthermore, PM 2 recalled that during the communist period information was controlled by the government and dispersed to the rural populace by an information officer known as the ‘ухуулагч’ (ohkhoolagch). However this ohkhoolagch, which operated as a bridge between the government and local people, disappeared during post-socialist times, and resulted in the rural populace receiving less information. Hence, rural people have become accustomed to not receiving information from authoritarian structures. In addition, PM 2 suggested that, although Mongolia is a democracy, a centralised, ‘communist style’ decision-making process still exists. Therefore, there is a generalised lack of understanding within Mongolian society on what constitutes a participatory decision-making process and democratic style of leadership.

Project Structure and Staff

Staff noted that Project A’s organisational structure of centralised decision-making hindered local participation. However, this was not because this structure took decision-making away from local people, but because decisions and benefits were slow to reach local people. The long process of creating the logframe and its inflexibility was also seen to hinder local participation, as this resulted in the slow implementation of project activities which could not be adjusted to meet changing circumstances.

Management staff noted that staff themselves were a barrier to local participation in a number of ways. Firstly, staff turn-over rates were high due to heavy work-loads and low wages; which meant new staff had to re-establish relationships with local people. Secondly,

38 A Mongolian idiom translated as ‘хөмөрсөн тоголо’.
39 ‘Ухуулагч’ is translated as ‘agitator’ or ‘propagandist’ (Global Dictionary, n.d.).
management reported that the participatory approach required more time and skills; while project staff stated that they had not received any specific training in participatory methodology. In addition, it was acknowledged that there still existed a ‘дараг’ (darag), translated as ‘boss’, mentality amongst some staff members.

**Personal Problems of Local People**

Staff stated that personal problems, such as poverty, illness, and drunkenness had caused participants to drop out of the project in order to adopt different livelihood strategies. Additionally, it was noted that some participants had suddenly moved to another *sum* or *aimag* due to family obligations resulting from family illness, death, or seasonal labour shortage.

**Mistrust**

Mistrust was identified by staff as taking two forms: local peoples’ mistrust of one another, and local peoples’ mistrust of rural development projects. The interpersonal mistrust was linked to the cultural phenomenon ‘тамын тоого’ (Taamin Togoo) translated as ‘Hell’s Cauldron’, as PM 2 stated, “Taamin Togoo means that people don’t have a good relationship with each other.” In addition, a mistrust of projects had arisen, as SS 1 explained:

> First when I introduced the project some herdsmen said ‘Projects are the boss’s food to eat’ – meaning that this is just another act of corruption and the benefits will go to the local government and project leaders. They thought the project will be implemented by big people and can be eaten in Ulaanbaatar and in the *aimag* even though it’s implemented in the *sum*.

As the quotations shows, due to past experiences, some local people believed that local government and/or project staff and their relatives and friends would capture the benefits of the project and hence mistrusted Project A.

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40 The idiom/folk story *Taamin Togoo* is not connected to the idiom ‘To turn over the cauldron’. *Taamin Togoo* was brought up in a number of interviews and the story is as follows: In Hell there are three cauldrons. The first is very full of Chinese people, and there is a devil guarding the cauldron with a big spoon. This devil is very busy as he must use his spoon to push the Chinese people back down into the cauldron as they frantically try to escape. The second cauldron contains Russian people, but is not so full as the first (Mongolians regard Russians more highly than the Chinese). Again a devil is guarding the cauldron and uses his spoon to make sure none of the Russians escape. The third cauldron contains Mongolian people. However, there is no devil guarding this cauldron because when a Mongolian tries to escape over the lip of a cauldron another Mongolia reaches up and grabs his/her leg and pulls them back down. Although explained slightly differently by each person, the basic meaning of the story is that Mongolians don’t want to see other Mongolians get a head in life and will do anything they can to bring them down to their own level. For some tellers of this story, this was related to Communism when it was taught there should be equality in society.

41 Mongolian idiom translated as ‘тосөл бол даргэ харрын шилх хөөл’.
Cultural and Historical Factors

Project staff identified a number of cultural and historical factors, such as ‘shame’ or ‘shyness’, risk aversion, networks of social obligation, a lack of problem-solving skills, and a top-down mentality which all impacted on the ability of rural people to participate in Project A. Staff commented that initially local people were too ‘ashamed’ or ‘shy’ to talk freely with project staff and in group meetings, as the following quotes highlight:

Our participants say ‘At first we were dark-minded and rude people.’ At first people, when they sat together, they couldn’t talk with each other freely. They were ashamed of each other and couldn’t say anything. The basis of our training is that people need to talk among themselves….They were like this for the first year – they couldn’t even talk with each other about their lessons. (SS 1)

Local people are a little shy, they are thinking if we say bad things the project is gone….Some herdsmen are quiet and always say ‘That’s okay, that’s fine’, saying ‘болже байн’, ‘болох л байх’, ‘болж л байгаа байх даа’\(^{42}\). They have a wish to speak but they don’t know what exactly to say….They don’t know exactly how to start talking about their thoughts, their wishes are still inside. (PM 2)

Staff also added that this shyness came through in meetings when participants, as countryside people, would ‘talk around in circles’ (translated as ‘бөөрөнхий яриа’) without making their ideas clear.

The herder cultural characteristic of risk-aversion was identified as an obstacle to participation in the project. Staff mentioned that initially herdsmen adopted a wait-and-see approach to the project, as they were cautious of new practices and lacked trust in outside interventions.

Staff suggested that a culture of ‘social networks of obligation’ or ‘relationship’ (defined by staff in terms of ‘мандаг хүмүүс’ (tandag humuus) proved a barrier to participation. Firstly, pressure was sometimes placed upon project staff by relatives and friends to select them as participants. Meanwhile, within the bag selection meetings, local people would often only support their Tandag Humuus.

\(^{42}\) Three Mongolian phrases which mean ‘that’s okay’ and are an example of ‘бооронхий яриа’.
Two of the project managers also suggested that local people lacked the necessary problem solving skills to engage fully with participatory methods. The reason being, according to OM 1, is that “The Mongolian school curriculum hasn’t taught people how to do brainstorming, problem solving, or creative thinking.”

According to staff, top-down mentalities existed within rural communities. For example, it was suggested that in general Mongolian people look towards a strong leader to lead and make all decisions, and will only work when there is such a strong leader or outside facilitator present. This top-down mentality was linked to Mongolia’s communist past, with the expectation still present within society that development projects would operate like past communist institutions.

**Expectations not Realised**

Staff acknowledged that while local people expected immediate material benefits, these were not initially given, and this proved a barrier to local participation in Project A. According to staff, this expectation of material benefits arose from a past history of socialism, as PM 1 explained:

*Participation can be difficult for Mongolian people because this is related to the social background of Mongolia. Under socialism we had a centrally planned economy....So we expected a wage would come no matter what we did, so in a way we became inactive.*

In addition, a number of staff commented that a more recent history of ‘relief’ rather than ‘development’ projects meant herders expected that foreign organisations always provided immediate material benefits.

**Others**

A smaller number of staff also suggested other barriers to participation of which the most significant were literacy levels, gender, working with the government, and the environmental situation. Firstly, staff pointed out that the literacy skills of some local people were lacking to the extent that they could not participate in seminars, and read project material. Secondly, gender may preclude participation, as AS 2 stated, “Usually two-thirds of the people in the seminars are women...in the countryside the women’s role is more than the man’s. Often the men send the women to the training as they are not interested.” Thirdly, it was understood by
staff that for true development to take place the local government had to be involved, as PM 2 stated, “If we separate local people and the local government it’s not development.” However, working with the government posed several difficulties, as local people mistrusted the government and its officials, and the government held expectations that the project would deliver direct benefits and handouts to the local community. Lastly, environmental degradation was seen to place all project activities in jeopardy, as PM 1 stated, “We encourage people to plant vegetables but at the same time the river is shrinking, water is an issue and the environment is being degraded. People work very hard but there are water problems.”

4.3.4.2.2 Local Participants

Selection Criteria

For project participants the most significant barrier to local participation in the project was the selection process. The selection process was seen to choose families that were capable of working hard, were middle class, and had resources, as participants stated:

“We have a tractor and a rotary hoe. When [the project staff] met us they said ‘Our family has many possibilities.’ We have our own equipment and my husband is a metal worker – so they told us ‘You have more possibilities.’ So they chose our family to participate as we are hard working. (P 4)

My family was chosen because it is a middle income family. (P 1)

As a result, families which did not fit these categories were often excluded from the project.

Poverty

It became apparent through interviews and casual conversations with local people that poverty, encompassing financial/capital, educational, and social poverty, was a leading barrier to participation. Firstly, the project required that participants contribute in part to project activities, for example buying blocks for the greenhouse, or fencing the vegetable field, as P 1 recalled:

The project doesn’t choose the ‘poorest of the poor’. This year the project chose some poor families… but the poor people aren’t able to build the greenhouse with the blocks because they don’t have money. They can’t supply money themselves.”

43 The phrase ‘poorest of the poor’ is translated as ‘нэн ядуу’ (nen yadoo).
As a result, those without financial and capital resources were unable to access the project. Secondly, a lack of literacy and numeracy skills would mean some local people could not engage fully with the project. For example, the educationally poor would have struggled to learn in seminars and write business plans. Furthermore, due to the project’s peer selection process, the poor, with weak social networks, were less likely to be chosen by fellow herders and government officials.

**Personal Problems of Local People**

Participants identified personal problems which inhibited local peoples’ participation in the project. Similar to project staff, it was noted that family obligations would often force people to suddenly move out of the project’s boundaries. Meanwhile, within one’s own local kin group, having to provide care for young children would also restrict involvement in the project. Participants, however, also suggested that ‘laziness’ was a key reason why countryside people did not participate, as local people commented:

> In general countryside people are lazy. (P 1)

> In my mind lazy people don’t participate in the project. They don’t want to attend the workshops but they just want to take the benefits. They are lazy and just want to take the things which are prepared for them – they have a belen setgletay. (P 3)

**Project Experiences**

Participants suggested that local peoples’ experiences within this and earlier projects had influenced their level of involvement in this project. It was noted that when benefits had been slow to materialise, or below expectations, local people had left the project to engage in other livelihood strategies. Project workshops and seminars having been held in busy times of year, such as the livestock birthing season, had also proved an obstacle. Furthermore, it was suggested that local people were weary of committing to the project as previous projects had failed to deliver on their promises.

**Natural Resource Degradation**

The leader of a vegetable-growing group in Project A expressed concerns that declining water resources might limit the success of his group. Firstly, it was noted that the water was drying up due to climatic changes and increased demands for use. Meanwhile, water in Mongolian culture is viewed as a common property resource; hence, this leader could not prohibit others
accessing this group’s water source as, P 3 stated, “If people come I have to give them water. I’m not allowed to refuse them access to my well.”

4.3.4.3 Barriers to Participation in Groups within Project A

Groups were the unit of participation within Project A, so therefore this section also documents the barriers to participation within these groups. Project staff identified a wider scope of barriers to participation in groups, which encompassed those identified by local participants (see Table: 6).

Table 6: Stakeholder Perceptions of Barriers to Participation in Groups in Project A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 5)</th>
<th>Local Participants (n = 4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance (4)</td>
<td>Distance (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Free-Riders (4)</td>
<td>Free-Riders (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust (3)</td>
<td>Mistrust (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Size (3)</td>
<td>Group Size (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited Outside Facilitation (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characteristics of Members (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Distance

Distance also proved to be the most significant barrier to participation within the groups of Project A. Firstly, large distances between herdens’ dwellings meant some people lived too far away from others to belong to a group. Secondly, geographical distances affected the selection of group members, as although people wanted to form a group with friends and relatives, distances were too great. As a result, people were forced to join together in groups with those closest to them, people whom they may not trust or be able to work with successfully. Thirdly, once involved in a group, distance and poor communication meant members were unable to effectively coordinate group activities.

Free-riders

Both project staff and participants identified free-rider problems. As P 3 stated “There are a few difficulties in the group, there are some free-riders. Some people have other work and don’t come, some people work hard and some don’t.” Although local participants stated group profits would be split amongst members based on their input, the sentiment was present

44 ‘Free-rider’ is translated as ‘түүлайлчлал’ – which literally means ‘stowaways’ (Global Dictionary, n.d.).
that free-riders would still receive significant profits, as P 3 stated “We became a group together so we will give these free-riders some vegetables.” This sentiment was perhaps built on a Mongolian culture of hospitality, and the social networks of obligation between group members.

*Mistrust*

According to staff and local participants interpersonal mistrust existed amongst group members. This was exacerbated by the distance problems, and associated with the economic class distinctions within rural society, as PM 1 commented, “It’s a little difficult for the rich, middle class, and poor families to work together and trust each other.” In addition, it was suggested by a staff member that some herders did not trust group work because of their experiences of group work within the collectives (negdel) of the communist era and the cooperatives (khorshoo) of the early 1990s.

*Group Size*

Project staff and local participants reported that increased group size had proved a barrier to group function. A large group meant there were increased difficulties in coordinating group work activities, and also hindered the ability to monitor the work effort of individual members, as SS 1 reported:

> When there are eight to nine people in the group they complain that some members in the group don’t work…This group’s arguments stopped when three families started working together and started to see other’s ideas were useful and important so they started to respect each other. Once the group drops to this number [three] families can work together. Three to four families is the best number for a group, which means around 15 people.

As a result, it was suggested that the optimal group size was three to four families. In addition, observations and interviews showed that successful groups ranged from two to four families, while groups consisting of more than eight families were problematic.

*Outside Facilitation*

Project staff noted that groups which the project externally formed disintegrated quicker than groups which were organised by local people. PM 2 linked this to recent history, when “…the government organised the collectives and then the cooperatives and [the government] were
powerful and used this power to give orders to people.” This staff member suggested that as the project did not control the day-to-day functioning of groups, those organised by the project quickly dissolved. In addition, it was reported that groups which formed solely to gain material benefits from the project broke-up easier than groups formed along kinship or relational bonds.

**Leadership**

While all groups had an elected leader, it quickly became apparent through interviews and casual conversations that leaders were people who held positions of power within the community and kinship networks prior to the project. In addition, project staff noted that groups did not always function in a participatory manner, as the group leader may use his/her status to take ownership and control over group resources and hence control the group’s function.

**Characteristics of Members**

Staff suggested that some individual characteristics of group members limited participation within groups. Firstly, it was noted that some herders had become ‘individualistic’ and did not want to work within a group, and if involved in a group would seek to dominate the use of group material resources. Secondly, staff reported that rich and poor herders could not always function together in groups as, “*The rich man doesn’t want to listen to the poor person’s idea and the poor person has the attitude that the rich person is powerful and are used to this situation*” (PM 2).
4.4 Results of Case Study: ‘Project B’

4.4.1 Introduction and Background to Project B

Project B is a long running development project which seeks to increase the food security and income levels of rural Mongolians through a communal vegetable field. The following section will present the results based on interviews with Project B staff and participants, and non-participants, including one Development Organisational Manager (DOM), one Project Manager (PM), the Project Agronomists\(^\text{45}\) (PAs), one Local Field Boss (LFB), six Participants (P), two Non-Participants\(^\text{46}\) (NP), and one Non-Participant Family (NPF).

Project B is currently being implemented by an International NGO (INGO) which has been working in Mongolia since the early 1990s. This INGO acts as an umbrella agency for a consortium of Christian organisations whose activities include community development, disaster relief, and poverty alleviation. Project B was initiated by this INGO in 1998 and is currently working in the sums of four aimags. In recent times Project B has been funded by two grants ($US180,000 for a three-year period) procured from a European bilateral development organisation and by the time this funding finishes in 2009 it is expected to have established itself as a separate NGO.

Project B’s overall goal is to help vulnerable families to grow vegetables in sufficient quantities to increase their food security and income levels so that they are no longer considered vulnerable. Project B’s focal activity is to establish large communal vegetable fields for its beneficiaries near sum centres. To achieve this, Project B provides local beneficiaries with all the necessary infrastructure and training over a three-year implementation period. In addition, Project B aims for participants to establish an official cooperative by the end of the project period, with project assets, such as tools, tractors etc., gradually transferred to the cooperative’s ownership.

\(^\text{45}\) A husband-and-wife team who both participated in the interview.
\(^\text{46}\) These two non-participants were participating in other vegetable projects
4.4.2 How did Stakeholders in Project B Understand the Concept of ‘Participation’?

4.4.2.1 The Practical Realities of Participation

Project Structure

Project B was managed by a Mongolian agronomist, and based out of an office at the Development Organisation’s (DO) headquarters in Ulaanbaatar. Within the aimags, a Mongolian agronomist was responsible for the day-to-day implementation of the project at the sum sites\(^ {47}\), while at each of these a local participant was employed as the local field boss. Meanwhile, the foreign DOM provided the PM with oversight and advice, as had the DO’s other foreign experts at various stages of the project’s history.

Project Identification, Planning and Preparation

The overall design and planning of Project B was performed by the PM who had been working in this role since 2000; while aimag and sum specific details were undertaken by the PAs. Project B had been initiated in the case-study sum at “the aimag governments request...because this area is poor” (PA). This request arose from the aimag governments relationship with the DO, established through past relief projects, as the DOM explained:

\[\text{There had been a lot of bad Zuuds...so [the DO] gave a lot of relief work and put in a lot of time and energy...and the local government appreciated it and could see these guys are real...and said we are willing to back you up if you have some other projects in mind.}\]

Following this request a contract of mutual understanding was drawn up between Project B and the aimag government. Then staff from Project B, together with the aimag government, selected the sums in which to implement the project based on need and available water supply. Following this, project staff would work closely with the sum government, which was essential as “The sum government provided [the project] with land” (PM). Furthermore, as the PAs pointed out, “The idea for the project really came from the government,” as the vegetable-growing focus fitted within the ‘green’ strategy of the national government\(^ {48}\).

\(^{47}\) In the aimag in which the case study site was located, there were five other project sites.

\(^{48}\) The Mongolian government has implemented a number of strategies to increase Mongolia’s production of basic food stuff. According to a Government Official interviewed the latest was ‘Атар 3 – бүх нийтэр ногоочин болсогой’ or ‘Virgin Lands 3 – Let's everyone become vegetable growers’. 
Thus, the targeted local community did not participate or contribute at all to the design, planning, and preparation stages of Project B. Rather the pre-designed blueprint of Project B was transferred into the case-study site based on the DO’s relationship with the local authorities.

**Selection of Participants**

Local people’s participation in Project B only began once they had made it through the project’s selection process. As outsiders to the local community, staff understood that, “The local government must help...select beneficiaries [because] we don’t know who is who” (PM). Hence, participants were chosen for interviews based on data from the sum’s social welfare office, with staff from this office assisting the PAs to conduct selection interviews.

Families were the basic unit of participation in project B. Specifically, the project selected low-income families, which had at least two or three people available to work, were officially registered to the sum, and were willing to participate in group work. In addition, the project’s aim of establishing a cooperative caused it to select certain types of low-income families, as the PAs explained:

> *We don’t want to choose the poorest of the poor (nen yadoo) because we need capable people in order to establish a cooperative. Of the families we choose we want 15 percent to have a concrete income. These people will be able to help establish a cooperative in the future....If we choose really poor people all the project’s resources...will break down or be damaged and then our project’s aim will not be realised.*

As the quotation shows, the poorest families or *nen yadoo* were deemed ‘too poor’ to participate and ‘capable’ families (i.e. not ‘too poor’) were prioritised. In addition, during these selection interviews local people were warned that “…they must participate in group labour well” (PAs) if they were to become successful project participants.

**Project Activities**

After selection the project provided local people with all the resources (material and educational) and direction to ensure their participation within the project’s main activity of group labour on a community vegetable field. This provision was described by the PAs:
[Project B] provides all things for the people, workshops in all aspects of the project, how and when to plant, how to cook the vegetables. We check up on the people, on where and how they are planting. We provide the technology and tractors and greenhouses, etc.

These material resources were staggered over the three-year implementation period. In the initial year, the project leased a large field rent-free from the local sum government. In addition, all start-up capital was provided, such as traditional crop seeds, tools, irrigation systems, and a tractor. In the second year, the project provided a greenhouse, cold store, and non-traditional crop seeds. Then, in the final year of the project, these assets were gradually transferred to the new cooperative’s ownership. Staff reported that asset contracts were now being introduced, as the PAs reported:

*Before, we didn’t say to [participants] ‘if you lose the spade you pay for it’...so people didn’t use the tools very economically, and we had to give them the same tool again in the second year. We changed the contract with people...if they leave the project...or break something...or don’t plant the 80 kgs of potatoes well...they must pay the project back.*

As the quote shows, contracts outlining how local families were to participate were introduced to facilitate the sustainable use of project assets.

In addition to materials, the project simultaneously provided training to participants. During the initial weeks of the first-year of the project, training was given formally by the PAs at fixed times throughout the week. The bulk of this training occurred at the project field and was hence, practical with the “participants shown by example of how to do [things] on the project field” (PAs). In addition, because the PAs worked alongside, shared meals, and lived next to the field with the participant families informal training also occurred. Furthermore, the time spent in these day-to-day interactions meant knowledge transference was facilitated by the relationship built between the PAs (outsiders to the community) and participant families.

Project B’s organisational structure meant staff controlled and monitored the participation of local families in the project. Firstly, the PM visited the case study aimag six times a year, to monitor progress, with these visits also helping to establish and maintain relationship with

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49 Potatoes, carrots, cabbage, and onions.
local participants and local government officials. Secondly, the PAs spent the growing season travelling between project sites, and living at the project sites which were in their initial year of implementation. Hence, the PAs could control and direct the initial day-to-day workings of participant families. In addition, a LFB was selected by the PAs from among the participants and employed to “...always control the people,” (PAs) and give workshops, especially when the PAs were away at other project sites. Of the two LFBs observed, both were men of standing within the community; for example, one was a current bag leader, and the other a previous secretary of the local labour union.

Project B’s activities and hence local families’ participation revolved around a communal vegetable field of 10 hectares. In the case-study site, 76 families entered the project, and initially worked together in a large group to clear the field of rocks and till the soil. Such work was physically taxing, as the PAs commented, “Because the field is a virgin field it is very, very difficult to break in, and the physical labour is very hard....We are working dawn to dusk”. Following this the field was divided into smaller family plots, with participant families planting, watering, and harvesting on their own plot of land. Activities started in the middle of May and finished around October, and during this period the project required a member of the participant family to live in close proximity to the field. Due to the nature of vegetable growing, participant families provided significant inputs of labour and time for six months, without receiving any material benefits until the harvest.

Project B’s large, family, vegetable plots meant the benefit for participation was not only food security but also income generation, in comparison to other projects in the region that focused on small, subsistence, vegetable patches attached to family yards. These benefits for participating in Project B’s activities gradually increased over the three years for two reasons. Firstly, as local families’ skills and experience widened and deepened, vegetable productivity increased. Secondly, over time the number of participant families in Project B fell steadily, which meant an increased plot size and an increased harvest for those families that remained.

**Exit Strategy/Cooperative Formation**

Project B’s end goal and exit strategy was the formation of a vegetable cooperative from the remaining families. The families in the case-study site had recently formed a cooperative,

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50 Evidenced by the fact that all participants knew the PM’s name and recalled his visits.

51 In the observed site, initially 76 families registered for the project, 50 remained by year two, and 14 families entered into the cooperative.
having been given workshops on cooperative formation from the project. In addition, the project assets were being transferred over a two-year period to the cooperative’s ownership. This year for the first time since entering the project, these families no longer had the project support; and hence were not to receive financial, technical support or direction from the project, only advice, as LFB explained:

The cooperative idea comes from the project...the first three years everything comes from the project...in the final year the participants have to organise the cooperative and finance it themselves. All the things we learnt and the inputs of the project has become the capital to form the cooperative.

However, as the quotation illustrates, the last three years of project support had provided the capital for the cooperative’s formation.

The cooperative had been formed over a series of group meetings and changes to vegetable production had been made to ensure the cooperative could survive without the project’s support. The meetings were deemed ‘non-democratic’ by some cooperative members, with the former LFB emerging as the cooperative’s leader. Out of these meetings, 17 rules for members had been established, and a decision was reached that all members needed to contribute 15,000 tugricks\textsuperscript{52} to the cooperative bank. However, membership contracts were, at the time of interviews, yet to be drawn up, and considered not needed by some as “people all knew each other from the project and some are related” (LFB). In addition, as an official government entity, this co-op had created a stamp/seal, registered with the government, and established a savings bank. Meanwhile to assure sustainability, a new lease for the field with the sum government had been procured, and a loan for expenses taken from the bank.

Following a group meeting the unit of participation in the cooperative had changed from family to ‘work group’ which comprised three or four families. Under the cooperative all members would work together to prepare the field for planting, and then the field would be divided into four sections. The four work groups would then be responsible for planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting on their own plot. In addition, a leader from each of the four groups had been elected and together these leaders formed the cooperative’s control council.

\textsuperscript{52} At the time of the field research US $1 equalled 1180 tugricks.
Amongst participants there was hope for the cooperative’s future based on their experience of participating in the project. However, a number of the participants were upset at the lack of participation in the decision-making process, confused over the division of harvest profits, and expressed doubt as to the cooperative’s future (see Section: 4.4.4.4).

4.4.2.2 Theoretical Understandings of Participation

DOM – “Participation as Attitudes and Techniques”

The DOM, a foreigner with an educational background in development studies and over nine years experience in Mongolia, held contrasting theoretical views on participation to the three Mongolian project staff and participants interviewed. The DOM understood participation in terms of a participatory attitude or spirit, and participatory techniques used by development workers. A participatory attitude, the most important element, was described as:

*Helping Mongolians to develop their potential...putting local people first, listening, trying not to move ahead too quickly in front of the community, waiting and being alongside and facilitating....What is important is the spirit of the approach, listening and waiting.* (DOM)

In addition, participation involved the use of participatory techniques, such as the “PRA tool box, ...local partners and exit strategies” (DOM). These techniques were seen as essential for development workers new to a region. However, according to the DOM such participatory techniques could be circumvented by those who had spent time living within Mongolia communities, as the DOM stated, “Most of our [workers] spend four to five years in the community. They get to know the community and its needs fairly well. They can design a project that meets the community needs without a lot of consultation.”

The DOM partly held to notions of higher levels of participation when defining the roles of local people as being an equal partner, helping to design the project, and driving the project, whilst project staff were envisioned as facilitators. However, the DOM also understood that project staff were to make the pivotal decisions and have control as they were to identify, design, and implement the project, whilst local people were to ‘help’ and ‘negotiate’.

Participation was thus a tool for “…reaching a consensus and getting [local] people on board” (DOM) and allowed development workers to design better projects without taking away their control. As a tool, the DOM also acknowledged that participation had its
weaknesses, commenting “It’s not a magic bullet that will always work...If you are just doing [participatory] exercises you can use these approaches and tools for any kind of thing; they can be just as exploitive as what others do.”

Project Staff - ‘Participation as Contributions’

Project staff clearly saw participation as the contributions local people made for the success of the project. These local contributions did not include decision-making which would affect the direction of the project; rather, much like a top-down company model, direction and control came from project staff.

Project staff principally identified local participation as contributions of physical labour, conceptualised as ‘working hard’. For example, when asked the question ‘How are local people involved in the project?’ the PAs replied, “They must give hard work only.” In addition, staff understood participation as a contribution of local peoples’ financial resources to the project, as the PM explained:

We require from local people only labour. So their role with regards to participation needs to be huge. Sometimes to give them free things is not so good for them. I try to work with them through a payment, for example...we contracted with them that they have to pay for cultivation and electric payments. So their participation is a little bit increased through that activity. Because they just pay money from their pocket to the field that’s why they are working hard.

As the quotation reveals, staff understood financial contributions would further increase the quality of local participants’ labour. These understandings of participation as local contributions to a company were highlighted by the written contract between the project and participant families. This was essentially an employment contract in that it outlined the physical work responsibilities of participants and the consequences of a failure to meet these.

Staff understood the role of the project as a provider, providing benefits and control, i.e. organising work duties, and giving directives, to local people. For example, during interviews with the PM, PAs, and LFB the most commonly repeated phase was ‘энэ төсөл бүх юм бэлэн’ which translates as ‘this project provides all things’. Staff understood that this provision would ensure the participation of local people. Fitting in with the company model,
knowledge and material benefits acted like a wage, enticing and rewarding people for their hard work which was controlled by the project staff.

Staff did not understand local participation as decision-making; rather it was implicitly understood that decisions and therefore control were to flow top-down through the project’s structure. Thus, instead of facilitation all staff identified their duties within the project as management and control. The PM’s role was the overall management and control of Project B’s activities and staff, and the maintenance of funding, through writing reports and applications. While at the sum project sites, the PAs were to manage and control resources (material and educational) and field activities, and select participants. Furthermore, the PAs and LFB, acting as company supervisors, had the task of controlling worker contributions of labour and resources, as the PAs commented:

*Planting the vegetables requires a lot of labour and some Mongolian people only do work when people are controlling them. When there is nobody in control they stop doing their work…. We chose the [LFB] to always be in control of the people when they are planting the vegetables.*

Thus, staff firmly believed that outside control was warranted to ensure local families participated appropriately.

Project B’s staff also understood that the local government needed to participate in the project. Firstly, the aimag government requested the project and helped select the sums which received the project. Secondly, as project staff were not ‘local’ to the community, they required local knowledge to select participants and turned towards the local government to supply this. In addition, the local government played a crucial role by designating land to the project.

Staff understood local participation as a tool to reduce costs and ensure the success and sustainability of the project, rather than local people making decisions. As a result, notions resembling empowerment were not directly expressed by project staff. However, staff understood that participating to the end of the project would equip families with the necessary resources (material, knowledge, and experience) to establish a cooperative independently. Thus, participating in the project would lay the foundations for an empowering process.
Local People – ‘Participation as Working Hard for the Company’

Local people clearly saw themselves as workers within the project; hence understandings of participation arose from this perception of employment within a company structure. As such, local people understood participation to mean contributions of labour to the project with the expectation of material returns. Accordingly, local people did not understand their participation to include independent decision-making or control.

Local people viewed their participation primarily in terms of contributing physical labour to the project, as the following replies to the question ‘How are you involved?’ illustrate:

\[
I \text{ have to dedicate all my labour to the project. (P 5)}
\]

\[
\text{During the last three years...we were participating in all things with our own hands. (LFB)}
\]

\[
\text{My participation is to plant all kinds of vegetables. (P 3)}
\]

Local people also understood that this labour should be in the form of group work; for example, P 3 stated, “In general the most important thing is to work together and not by ourselves,” and P 5 commented, “Participation means people are working together in one group.” Furthermore, participation was understood as more than just working, as all local people stressed during interviews that they were to be idekhtie (active) or sain\(^{53}\) (good) workers. According to local participants an idekhtie worker worked hard in order to overcome difficulties\(^{54}\) and reap a better harvest, while, a sain worker was polite, had a good relationship with others, helped fellow workers, did not drink vodka, and did not argue.

In accordance with their understanding of participation as employment, local people saw participation as the means to access project benefits. Thus the project’s principal role was identified as being a provider of resources or ‘wages’. These resources were tangible (seeds, tools, cold storages, greenhouses, irrigation, fields) as well as intangible (vegetable knowledge). Local people associated the PA with the source of knowledge, as P 5 stated, “The project staff’s role is to advise, teach, and explain to us what to do....the project staff teach us about everything.”

\(^{53}\) Mongolian ‘сайн’.

\(^{54}\) There was an expectation amongst participants that success only came through difficult circumstances. P1 and 2 explained this by recalling a Mongolian idiom, “зөвж хийсэн хоол бол амттай,” or “Food which is made through suffering tastes sweet.”
Within interviews and conversations local people recalled few decisions that they had made in the project beyond the decision to join; the most frequent comments were similar to P 4’s statement, “We don’t make any decisions in the project – only we learn how to plant vegetables.” In seeing themselves as workers, local people understood their participation to involve no more decision-making power than any normal Mongolian employee. Hence decisions were to be made within the project’s framework, rather than decisions which would influence the project’s direction.

None of the local participants understood their role as controlling the project; instead control was perceived to come from an outside source. Local people principally identified the LFB as being in control of the workers, as P 5 noted, “The field boss is in control”. The LFB controlled the day-to-day work duties and work quality of participants, as the LFB himself stated, “I am the overall boss….My role is to organise the field correctly, and to control the workers on the field as some people don’t finish their job completely.” Secondly, local participants identified the PAs, who visited the field intermittently, as having the overall control of the project. While lastly, the PM was also identified as having control within the project. Thus, local participants viewed their participation as occurring within a hierarchical, top-down structure, and as such they did not equate participation with control.

The interviews were undertaken during the project’s exit strategy while participants’ families were in the process of forming a cooperative. As a result, the majority of local interviewees had begun to see that their role was changing and their participation would now not only involve their labour but decision-making and control. Hence, for participants, becoming a member of the cooperative was the final empowering result of their participation within the project.

4.4.2.3 The Language of Participation
Within Project B specific Mongolian words and phrases were used to describe elements of participation. This ‘language of participation’ reinforced stakeholders’ understanding of participation as contributions of labour within the project’s framework.

Development Organisational Terminology
Project B was designed and implemented by an international Christian NGO whose purpose, according to policy documents is, ‘to work with Mongolians to achieve their full, God-given potential through development and relief’. While there is no mention of empowerment and
participation in these documents, the DO does attach a moral value to its activities, in so much as they will bring about the ‘full, God-given potential’ of the people of Mongolia.

‘Participation’
Staff, local people, and project documentation made use of the two generic terms for participation, ‘оролцох’ (ohrulzokh) and ‘хамрах’ (hamrakh), to describe local people’s role in the project. More commonly, however, the words and phrases used to talk about local people’s participation in Project B reflected an understanding of ‘contributing labour’. For example, project staff defined local participation in the project as ‘хамтдаа ажиллаар’ (hamtdaa ajulaar) which means ‘working together’, while local participants repeatedly talked about their ажил (ajul) or work, and хөдөлмөр (khordorlmor) or labour.

‘Group Work’
Project B consisted of two types of group work: a ‘large group’ in which all participant families worked together to prepare the field, and a ‘family group’ which worked on separate plots. This large-group was referred to by staff as, ‘нийтийн гаралтай kholdorlmor,’ or ‘олон нийтийн ajul,’ which both translate as ‘community labour’. Meanwhile, the word идэвхтйэ (idekhtie) was once again used by staff (see Section: 4.3.2.3) to clarify that participants should idekhtie ohrulzokh or ‘participate actively’ within this ‘community labour’. Thus, descriptions of ‘large group’ functions primarily utilised language which spoke in terms of active physical labour.

The ‘family group’ used within project B consisted of a Mongolian family unit. The words aйл (ail) and өрх (urkh) were used to describe this family unit interchangeably and both translate as ‘family, household, or groups of gers’ (Global Dictionary, n.d.). In Mongolian culture, the understanding of urkh and ail is that of people who live together in relationships of social obligation. Hence, in Project B the family unit of participation extended beyond the nuclear family to also incorporate kin and friends who operated together as a family or household unit.

Participants generally referred to the cooperative by the generic term хоршоо (khorshoo). However, project staff routinely used the terms ‘нөхөрлөл khorshoo’ (friendship cooperative) or ‘khorshoo бүлэг’ (business group), as a way to separate these small cooperatives from the khorshoo of the 1990s, which were not highly regarded by rural people.
Within the cooperative, local participants referred to the work groups of three to four households by the term бригада (brigade). The term brigade was introduced into the Mongolian language from Russia and means ‘work team’ (Collins Russian Dictionary, 2006; Global Dictionary, n.d.). This term was first introduced during the Communist period when livestock were placed into collectives (negdels), which were further divided into smaller sub-units called brigades. The brigade was far removed from participatory notions, with its leadership, structure, and production targets all set by the government’s central committee (Goldstein & Beall, 1994). As such, the term brigade was an adequate description of the role of work-group within the cooperative, i.e. to work and take directions from leadership. Furthermore, the leader of the brigades and the cooperative were generally referred to as a дарга (darag) which translates as chief, head, director (Global Dictionary, n.d.). However, within Mongolian culture the term darag is commonly used with connotations of an authoritarian boss who issues orders, controls workers, and should not be questioned.

**Communist Threads**

Several of the participants during interviews used language which reflected Mongolia’s socialist history. For example, a brigade leader complained that fellow participants had labelled him a ‘симвек’ (Mongolian slang for ‘communist leader’), after they objected to him “…telling them to do this and do that, and always teaching them” (P 1). In addition, some participants used the Russian word фронт (front) to describe the power of people joining and working together, as P 2 stated, “We will join together and become one big worker’s group, on one big field, we will become one front.” Phrases were also used which mirrored socialist propaganda; for instance P 1 stated, “From now on planting vegetables will become our life’s work,” and P 3 repeated the phrase, “We are organising a cooperative to use the power of many people.”

### 4.4.3 What did Stakeholders in Project B Perceive as the Benefits of Participation?

#### 4.4.3.1 Stakeholder Perceptions of the Benefits of Project B

Staff and local participants’ understanding of the benefits of participating in Project B was limited to benefits for local people (see Table: 7). Staff promptly identified both tangible and

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55 *Фронт* translates as ‘military front’ (Collins Russian Dictionary, 2006).
intangible benefits. Meanwhile, local participants initially only identified tangible benefits, however further question prompts were needed to draw out the intangible benefits listed.

Table 7: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Benefits of Project B for Local People

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 4)</th>
<th>Local Participants (n = 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tangible Benefits – food, income,</td>
<td>Tangible Benefits – food, income,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>material assets (4)</td>
<td>material assets (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge/Mental Investment (4)</td>
<td>Knowledge/Mental Investment (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooperative – based on social</td>
<td>Cooperative – based on social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connections and trust (4)</td>
<td>connections and trust (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hope (1)</td>
<td>Self Esteem/Hope (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Group Work (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Outside Facilitation (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Tangible Benefits_

All staff and participants interviewed identified increased food security and income generation as the main tangible benefit of Project B. These benefits impacted the whole family and increased over time, as P 5 explained:

_The first year I harvested exactly one year’s food needs for my family. The second year I provided for my family’s needs, sold the remainder and brought ten goats...I got two kilograms of Cashmere from the goats. Now if I need money I sell some potatoes._

As this quotation reveals, the income generated from selling excess potatoes meant participants had the financial capital to engage in additional livelihood strategies.

Staff and participants further noted the material assets which the project provided as benefits. These included seeds, tools, the irrigation system, a tractor, cold store facilities, and a greenhouse. It was understood that these benefits would provide the necessary physical capital for the establishment of the cooperative:

_[The benefit] for people is the establishment of a cooperative. At the end of the project the assets will need to be owned by the cooperative. Then the cooperative can increase the families’ income. (PM)_
The establishment of a cooperative would therefore enable the benefits of increased food security and income generation to sustainably continue after the project had exited. However, without the project’s ongoing financial support, many participants expressed doubts as to the sustainability of these benefits.

In addition, local participants expressed the idea that benefits flowed to the sum, as P 1 and 2 reported, “We aim to supply everyone in the [closest sum] with safe, healthy food from this project.”

Knowledge/Mental Investment
Staff and participants, alike identified knowledge as a major benefit of the project. This knowledge covered all aspects directly related to vegetable growing, including tilling, planting, weeding, watering, harvesting, and cook and storing new varieties.

Local participants primarily saw the PAs as the source of this ‘new’ knowledge:

*The project staff teach us...they show us what to do...they have to give us a lot of instructions, how to grow this and that and show us by practical examples....If they don’t teach us we will never know what to do...They must show us everything.*

(P 1 & 2)

*[The project agronomists’] role is to teach people how to plant, they have to work together with the local people and show them practically how to do things.* (LFB)

This knowledge was disseminated by on-field, practical examples as the PM stated, “We show people how to plant by hand not by sitting in a room”. This method was utilised by project staff because “…herders are not so good with writing and listening...so we show herders instead of giving written training manuals” (PM). In addition, local participants reported that peer-to-peer learning took place, firstly between the participant families that worked alongside each other, and secondly by non-participant families learning through their day-to-day interactions with participants.

This knowledge was also termed a ‘mental investment’ because it provided local people with a new, practical skill, “Learning to plant vegetables is a mental investment. Now I know how to plant vegetables by myself” (P 5). As a skill this knowledge was directly linked to food security and income generation, as P 3 & 4 reported, “We have learnt to plant vegetables, and
now we are capable of planting vegetables…we can provide for our own needs and sell the remainder of the vegetables.” Furthermore, the project provided workshops on cooperative formation and small business skills, which, together with the knowledge about vegetables became the mental capital needed to establish a cooperative.

**Cooperative Based on Social Connections and Trust**

Cooperative formation was seen as a project benefit, with staff and participants pointing out that improved social connections provided the social capital needed for its establishment. Project B’s large group-labour activities provided an opportunity for participants all from the same bag to work, share meals, and live alongside each other, as P 1 and 2 explained:

> We didn’t know anyone well before the project….Now that we have been working together we know each other well and out of the difficulties of work we have gotten to know each other even better.

Therefore, interactions during the project strengthened social connections between participants. Furthermore, due to a mixture of poor-and-middle class families in the project, some social connections bridged social levels; for example, participants had established a relationship with the LFB, who was also the local bag leader.

These social connections provided the trust or ‘social capital’ needed to establish the cooperative. Local participants pointed out that working together meant they got to know the characteristics, including work habits, of their fellow participants, as P 5 explained:

> [To form the cooperative], firstly we need to know about the people we are working with. Because all people have a different characteristics⁵⁶, some people do work only when someone tells them….We have been working together here for three years, so I now know the characteristics of people….I trust other people now somewhat….I have a really good relationship and spirit with the other members of the cooperative.

As this participant indicated, the time spent working together meant participants had built relationships with one another and had become tandag humuus. This was highlighted by the DOM’s statement that, “[Mongolian people] have to help tandag humuus, that is people whom they know…and through Project B this network is extended.” Furthermore, staff

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⁵⁶ Mongolian word used here is ‘zaran’ which translates as personality, character, temperament, nature, disposition, custom, or habit (Global Dictionary, n.d.).
and participants identified trust as a benefit of these relationships, with this trust providing the social capital for the establishment of the cooperative, as the PAs reported, “The participants have encountered difficulties for three years and overcome them so they trust each other, and on this basis they have formed a cooperative.”

Self Esteem/Changed Mindset
During interviews and casual conversation it was evident that local participants had gained self esteem from participating in Project B. For example, P 5 expressed pride in being recently awarded the sum vegetable grower of the year. Meanwhile, P 1 and 2 reported that they had “…a very high spirit since participating,” and as such wanted to supply the local bag’s vegetable needs from the field, and “…support and teach others to plant vegetables.”

Participating in Project B also brought a change in mindset to local people, as the OM described, “Horizons get expanded on hearing and seeing new things…their outlook on life changes, they are more open to new ideas, there is more hope.” This hope for the future was expressed by a number of participants:

In the future we should build a farm, many buildings and have electricity here. (P 3 & 4)

We are starting to think about future possibilities, chickens, pigs, a farm and planting fruit trees around the field. (P1 & 2)

Furthermore, this hope for the future also existed independently of the project’s framework, for example, P 5 stated, “I will leave [the cooperative] if it’s not profitable…. This year is an experiment; if this year is bad I will get out of the cooperative and plant myself.”

Group Work
In addition to identifying its role in increasing social connections, local participants understood that group work, in itself, was a benefit, as P 3 and 4 explained:

Group work, working together is the most important benefit….If we are working one-by-one it is unsuccessful, so we decided to organise the cooperative and join together. We understand that people can’t work by themselves as some are experienced and some are not.
Group work was seen as more successful and therefore more profitable than working individually as it dispersed experience. As a result the project’s idea of a cooperative was embraced; however, once the DO exited the cooperative quickly changed the composition of its groups from individual families to *brigades* of three or four families.

*Outside Facilitation*

A number of local participants saw the outside facilitation as a benefit of Project B. This is because the presence of project staff on the vegetable field meant all local participants worked hard, as *P 5* reported “*Some people only do work when the PAs tells them, when someone is working besides the PAs they are working well and when [the PAs] go to another sum they stop working.*” As such, cooperative members suggested free-rider issues had increased following the project’s withdrawal.

### 4.4.3.2 Stakeholder Priorities of Local Benefits in Project B

*Project Staff*

Project staff prioritised the material benefits of food security and income generation, which were the goals of Project B. However, the higher priority for staff was the formation of the cooperative because it would enable these material benefits to continue after the project exited. Hence, for project staff the primary benefit was sustainable food security and income generation provided by a cooperative; and the secondary benefit was the provision of these material benefits during the projects tenure (see Figure: 6).

Staff identified material assets that the project gifted and knowledge as the sub-benefits of the project. It was understood that material assets and knowledge had to work in tandem to ensure immediate and sustainable benefits (see Figure: 6). Firstly, material assets and knowledge provided for participants immediate needs of food security and income during the project. Secondly, material assets and knowledge became the physical and mental capital needed for the establishment of a successful cooperative which provided continuing food security and income generation.
**Local Participants**

During interviews, local participants universally identified the material benefits they had gained from their labours within the project (see Figure: 7). These material benefits were firstly recognised as vegetables and then attributed as the source of increased food security and income generation. For participants, staple crops, like potatoes, cabbages, carrots, and turnips were prioritised as they could readily be sold for cash. This cash in turn provided participants with the freedom to engage in other livelihood strategies, such as acquiring a car, or collecting cashmere from the acquisition of goats.

Secondly, local participants also prioritised knowledge because it enabled them to access material benefits (see Figure 7). This knowledge was seen as the skills needed for planting vegetables learnt through practical training and three-years of on-field experience. For example, in response to the question ‘What are the most important benefits?’ P 3 and 4 stated, “*We have learnt to plant vegetables, and we are now capable of planting vegetables....We can provide for our own [food] needs and then sell the remainder of the vegetables.*” Therefore, knowledge was prioritised because as a skill it provided vegetables, which meant food security and income generation. Furthermore, the majority of local participants did not prioritise the project-supplied materials assets for vegetable production, which enabled this skill to be put into use. A reason for this could be that these material assets were seen as group, not individual, property and hence not a visible, personal benefit.
Three local participants, in addition to material benefits and knowledge, prioritised group work and project-supplied assets. Firstly, the oldest participants prioritised group work because they struggled to perform the more physically taxing duties; and therefore, group work was essential for them. Meanwhile, the LFB identified the cooperative’s assets, such as the irrigation system and tractor, as a benefit because as the director of the cooperative these were now at his disposal.

During interviews, the cooperative was identified as a benefit only following question prompts. As interviews took place pre-harvest in the first year of the cooperative, local people were unsure as whether the cooperative would prove as profitable as the project. Hence, for local participants the cooperative had yet to prove beneficial.

**Figure 7: Local Participants Priorities of the Benefits of Project B**
4.4.4 Which Factors Influenced Participation within Project B?

4.4.4.1 Reasons Local People Participated in Project B

Table 8: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Reasons Local People Participated in Project B

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 4)</th>
<th>Local Participants (n = 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food Security/Income Generation (4)</td>
<td>Food Security/Income Generation (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Poverty/Unemployment (2)</td>
<td>Financial Poverty/Unemployment (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship (2)</td>
<td>Relationship (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Facilitation (2)</td>
<td>Positive Information/Feedback (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Food Security/Income Generation
Staff and local people alike reported that tangible benefits of food and income were the primary reasons for local participation in Project B. Staff realised that the promise of tangible benefits were most attractive, as the DOM commented, “Local people see the tangible…at the front it’s all the tangible benefits that are of real importance otherwise they wouldn’t bother getting involved.” Furthermore, staff understood that Project B’s tangible benefits were more substantial than other projects in the region, as the PAs explained:

In [this aimag] there are a lot of different vegetable projects implemented. Our difference is that the participants are working a community field, not their own yards and we give all things that they need, finance, field, seeds, dung, storeroom, green house, and irrigation. [Project B] should provide 600 kg of potatoes for each family and people become professional vegetable growers. [Other projects] don’t provide training, continuing support, or advice and only give a small amount of potato seeds and only come at the harvest to take some pictures.

According to staff, the material assets and training provided by the project meant the benefits of Project B were not only food security but importantly a new income-generating profession for participants. For a certain sector of local people this newly acquired income-generating livelihood strategy, proved more attractive than a project with purely subsistence food benefits. Furthermore, as more and more people dropped out of the project this new profession of vegetable growing become increasingly more profitable for the remaining participants.
Local people, when asked the question ‘Why are you participating?’ pointed to the project’s benefits of food security and income generation. Local participants interviewed indicated that they had chosen the project because, unlike other projects, larger amounts of vegetables were grown which provided for both subsistence and cash needs. Hence, Project B was described as more profitable:

*This project is profitable for me because I can provide for my family’s needs but also sell the vegetables.* (P 5)

*This project is not like [the others in the aimag] it doesn’t just give us handouts of food, it helps us to form a cooperative…Other projects are not profitable because they plant potatoes on a small field, without irrigation…then when there is no rain there is no water for the plants.* (P 1 & 2)

Furthermore, as the last quotation shows, participants had remained in the project because the establishment of a cooperative might allow them to continue in this new profession.

**Financial Poverty/Unemployment**

Both staff and local participants pointed to financial poverty arising from unemployment as a reason why local people chose to participate in the project:

*I chose this project because it would increase my income and because I wasn’t working.* (P 5)

*I joined the project because I have a profession but I couldn’t find a job.* (P 1 & 2)

*I chose this project…to increase my income. I am retired so I have nothing else to do. We need to plant vegetables for our future because now life costs are increasing in Mongolia and we can’t buy rice and flour.* (P 3 & 4)

Therefore, Project B, with benefits of food security and income generation but also its requirements of long-term labour commitment, was a viable employment option for those without other income generating strategies. As such, Project B, rather than other vegetable growing projects, was chosen by the unemployed who had the necessary time and motivation to become professional vegetable growers.
Relationship

The DOM and the majority of participants indicated that a strong relationship between project staff and local people encouraged participation in project B. For example the DOM stated:

*Relationship is a big deal here, especially in rural areas. You have to spend the time getting to know people; it pays a lot of dividends. People will be more willing to participate if they know you.*

Project B’s local participants, supported this observation by pointing to the intimacy they shared with the PAs, as a positive experience. For example, P 1 and 2 noted, “The PAs teach us, and they always introduce themselves to us….The PAs understand the participants well, teaching us, helping us and sharing food with us. They are always worried about us and pay close attention to us.”

External Facilitation

Project staff suggested that external facilitation, in the form of leadership, trust, and ‘work’ accountability, was a reason why local people joined and continued to participate in project B. Firstly, during the project, staff acted as a visible leader who organised and directed participants. According to the PM, at another project site:

*We held the cooperative training and workshops three times. People agreed [to establish a cooperative] but they didn’t. They said ‘We don’t have a strong leader’, and they argued in the field [with each other]. So we had to contract that site to the local government who encouraged the planting.*

In addition, the project was seen as trustworthy to local participants because it was implemented by a foreign organisation. As the DOM commented, “Mongolians tend to trust foreigners more than Mongols…only if a foreign [organisation] is heavily involved will everyone put their vegetables into a marketing cooperative.” Furthermore, staff attested that when they were present local participants worked harder in the large-group activities because “when there is nobody in control [Mongolians] will stop doing their work” (PAs).

Local people also indirectly indicated external facilitation as a reason for ongoing participation in the project. Firstly, local participants identified the PAs as teachers, who

57 The verb used here is ‘танилцах’ which can be translated as introduce, get to know, and become acquainted with (Global Dictionary). This verb is the root of the phrase ‘тандаг хүмүүс’ (tandag humuus).
provided the knowledge for vegetable growth. Secondly, the PAs were seen to encourage participants to work harder and direct participants in their work duties. Thirdly, participants understood that the project’s staff and its structure had prevented free-rider problems. These free-rider issues were, according to participants interviewed, now present because of the absence of an external agent of control.

**Positive Information/Feedback**

A number of local participants reported that positive information encouraged them to join Project B. For some, this encouragement to participate came through feedback from their peers, as the LFB stated, “I decided to follow the example of other local people who are planting vegetables...so I joined the project.” While, for others, a positive experience with the DO and its staff drew them towards Project B, as P1 and 2 explained:

> Firstly, the [DO] organised a rubbish pick-up day in our town, and we participated in this. We had heard about the vegetable project from people in other sums. So we asked the [DO] staff if they have the intent to plant vegetables in our town. They answered us that they will be implementing the project next year and they talked with us about the project.

As this quotation shows, a step-by-step process of peer encouragement and positive information/feedback facilitated these peoples’ involvement in Project B. Firstly they heard about the vegetable projects from their peers and were also encouraged by their positive feedback. Secondly, they worked with the DO and through this gained inside knowledge and experience about the DO. Thirdly, they were encouraged to join Project B following interactions and conversations held with staff. These interactions with staff continued during the project, with staff building a relationship with participants whilst retaining power as an external facilitator.

**4.4.4.2 Reasons for Non-Participation**

Adjacent to the case-study site was a 0.5 hectare vegetable field on which a Mongolian family were planting vegetables separately from Project B. A focus group interview was conducted with this family to find out why they were not participating in Project B.

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58 The focus group consisted of the father, mother, and two children both in their mid-twenties.
This non-participant family (NPF) had initially wanted to join Project B in 2005 but due to distance and lack of transport were unable to attend the information seminars held in the sum centre. However, a year later this NPF established a vegetable field next to the project site to provide food security and income generation. This NPF, although given subsequent opportunities to join the cooperative, had chosen to remain growing vegetables as an independent family unit. This choice was based on the NPF’s own resources, and disincentives which made independence from the cooperative more profitable.

The NPF had access to resources which meant they could engage in vegetable growing without Project B’s direct support. The NPF contained two adult children who were university qualified agronomists who spent summers with their family. As a result, the NPF had attained the knowledge to grow vegetables without Project B’s assistance. In addition, the NPF consisted of three adult children who earned a salary which had been used to finance start-up costs. Furthermore, one of these children was the vice-director of the local sum and through his position had secured a licence for the NPF to use the land adjacent to the project field.

For the NPF, continuing to grow vegetables independent of the project was seen as more financially profitable for a number of reasons. Firstly, independence meant the NPF could be more flexible in their choice of crops; for example, in 2008 they had planted potatoes and fodder crops for the livestock. Secondly, in previous years the NPF had “harvested twice as many vegetables as those who participated in the project” (NPF). Thirdly, the NPF was discouraged from joining a work-group with ‘lazy’ members, as the NPF explained:

*The project participants don’t work hard on the land, because they are not working for themselves. Some people who do very little work harvest very little. The people in the project are the poor and unemployed so they don’t have any idea in their mind about how to work hard…. When the PA and the LFB are at the field they will work hard…but if the boss isn’t at the field they won’t work hard.*

Hence, after seeing the work effort of project participants, the NPF recognised the potential of free-rider problems if they joined the cooperative. As a result, the NPF indicated that they would only join a project if they could participate as a family unit.
**4.4.4.3 Barriers to Participation in Project B**

In the case study site, staff reported that large numbers of local participants left Project B throughout its project cycle. The PM reported that 90 families were selected, 76 entered into the project, 60 finished the first year, 50 started the second year, 24 finished the third year, and 14 had formed the cooperative. As a result, this section will highlight both the obstacles local people faced in accessing the project, and reasons given for participants leaving the project. Furthermore, Section: 4.4.4.4 will highlight the barriers to participation staff and local participants identified within the cooperative.

**Table 9: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Barriers to Participation in Project B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 4)</th>
<th>Local Participants (n = 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poverty (4)</td>
<td>Expectation of Benefits (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectation of Benefits (3)</td>
<td>Poverty (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty of Physical Labour (3)</td>
<td>Difficulty of Physical labour (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance (3)</td>
<td>Free-Riders (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural and Historical Factors (3)</td>
<td>Environmental Degradation (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other – private lives (1), environmental degradation (2), registration (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Poverty**

Poverty was identified by both staff and local participants as a major barrier to accessing and remaining within Project B. Staff stated that the ‘poorest of the poor’ or ‘nen yadoo’ were not selected for the project. Primarily, staff believed nen yadoo lacked the capacity needed to bring about the project’s goal of establishing a cooperative, as the PAs explained:

> We don’t want to choose the nen yadoo because we need capable people who have the capacity to establish a cooperative....[The nen yadoo] have limited mental capacity so we don’t want them in the project and they usually drop out⁵⁹...Nen yadoo are illiterate so they aren’t capable of managing a company. If we choose really poor people, all the project’s resources, storage, and the field, etc will break down or be damaged and then a cooperative can’t be established....When poor people are preparing the field they want the seed potatoes right then so they can eat them.

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⁵⁹ The word used to describe ‘dropping out’ or ‘leaving’ the project was ‘няцах’, which translates literally as ‘to retreat, go back, step back, or recoil’ (Global Dictionary, n.d.).
As this quotation shows, for staff, the *nen yadoo* had insufficient mental capacity to manage a cooperative, and lacked the financial and resource capacity to maintain the cooperative’s assets, and to forgo eating the seed potatoes.

Staff and local participants also both reported that poverty, including one or more of these forms: social, physical, educational, and financial/economic poverty, caused participants to leave Project B. Firstly, participants with weak social networks, such as female-headed households were unable to enlist a regular supply of labour from their *tandag humuus* to organise an effective ‘work group’. Secondly, the participants who were weak physically struggled with the strenuous physical nature of vegetable growing. Additionally, participants who did not have the necessary educational background could not fully engage in the project’s information and training sessions. Furthermore, Project B required a six-month commitment of labour before any vegetables were harvested. Therefore, participants who pursued day-to-day subsistence livelihoods lacked the financial or economic resources to participate in a project that required such commitments without providing a food source. As a result, these participants left the project to pursue livelihood opportunities that guaranteed immediate subsistence benefits.

*Expectations of Material Benefits*

Staff and local participants both reported that participants withdrew from Project B when expectations of material benefits went un realised. Some participants had an expectation, based on the practice of other vegetable projects in the region, that they would receive food such as flour and rice on a daily or weekly basis, as *P 1 and 2* explained:

*There are no direct benefits at the start of the project. Some people participated so they can get material benefits, so they can get flour or rice, but this project doesn’t give them flour….After working on the field sometimes people asked [the staff] ‘Will you give us flour?’ [The staff] replied, ‘We won’t,’ so the people said, ‘We will go and work for [another project].’*

In project B, participants did not receive intermittent benefits of food or cash in the six-month period prior to the harvest. Such intermittent benefits were essential for those in subsistence poverty, and caused people to exit the project, as *P1 and 2* commented:

*The big problem is from April to August we are only working on the field and most people didn’t have an income for their family, so it’s really difficult. We have...*
problems with food and we can’t provide for our other needs. Most people leave because they want to eat instead of working.

Meanwhile, the latent material benefits meant some participants left the project to engage in other ‘easier’ livelihood strategies, as described by the LFB:

In this area there is gold in 90 percent of the ground. When people are worried about their life they left the project and went to the gold fields. People return to the gold fields because it’s an easier way for them to earn money.

In addition, staff reported that some local people joined the project just to gain the expected material assets, as the PA described:

Some people heard this project gives tools, such as spades, etc. So they participate to get the tools and then go to the gold mine to use them.... [Some people] took the 100 kg of potatoes which were meant to be seeds and then they ate them because they were expecting a hand-out.

Hence, a number of local people participated until they received the materials needed to engage in livelihood strategies of their choice.

Staff linked these expectations of intermittent and immediate material benefits to Mongolian history and culture. For the PA, the recent experience of relief projects had made “people expect that all things will be provided for them in a project.” Meanwhile, the DOM related this expectation to a culture of short-term orientations; “Mongolian people tend to look short-term. They look for the immediate benefits and are in a hurry for it, they don’t look long term.”

Difficulty of Physical Labour
Staff and local participants alike both identified the arduous manual tasks required to grow vegetables as reason why participants left Project B. Local people viewed vegetable growing as physically strenuous, and especially difficult for the poor, elderly, and children, as P1 and 2 stated:

The work is very hard and people have nothing to eat which makes them tired, hungry and angry so they leave the project. Work is very hard so sometimes the old and young find it too difficult.
Meanwhile, in the first months of the project the most physically taxing activities, such as manually breaking in the field, took place; hence in Project B’s initial stages many participants dropped out to pursue other less physical livelihood options.

While staff acknowledged the difficult nature of vegetable growing, “The work on the field is a little bit hard so that’s why some people drop out” (PM), they also viewed local peoples’ work ethic, or ‘laziness’ as a reason for dropping out. As the PAs stated, “Countryside people are lazy…. Mongolian people can’t do labour, they retreat from hard work and labour.”

In addition, interviewees suggested that local people had false expectations regarding the difficulty of growing vegetables within Project B:

\[
\text{Some people didn’t think it would be very hard work so when it got tough they dropped out. Those who thought it would be hard stayed because they expected it. (P 5)}
\]

\[
\text{People expected all things would be prepared and they wouldn’t have to work hard. They expected they would take all the benefits without working. (PAs)}
\]

Moreover, vegetable growing was new to most herders and its tasks foreign to those used to the less physical and independent nature of livestock herding. As a result, when activities proved unexpectedly difficult, those who had anticipated an easy path to material benefits left Project B.

\textit{Distance}

Staff reported that geographical distances obstructed local people from participating in project B. The project required one member of each participant family to be present at the field during the growing season. However, this proved problematic for families who continued to engage in semi-nomadic livelihoods, which required them to travel some distance from the project site, as the PAs described:

\[
\text{All of the participants are herders, so they are worried about their livestock. In summer time they must move with their livestock to temporary places...so they can’t always stay next to the field...this is difficult for people so they drop out.}
\]
In addition, in the case-study site the vegetable field was 18 kilometres from the sum centre, which meant participants either had to move their gers to the field, or commute daily. This presented a barrier, as P1 and 2 explained:

*People who have possibilities have moved to the field, those without haven’t…. Some people can’t participate because they are really, really poor and can’t separate themselves from their relatives and move to the field because they wouldn’t have enough food to eat.*

Therefore, participant families without the financial, social, or material resources to live at, or commute to, the field were marginalised from the project.

**Cultural and Historical Factors**

Project staff highlighted a number of cultural and historical factors which limited local participation in Project B. Firstly, the majority of participants were herders and therefore prioritised livestock over vegetable growing:

*The most popular method to make a living is to raise animals – Mongolia has a nomadic culture and it’s our way of life. (PM)*

*In Mongolia it’s impossible to put livestock and agriculture on the same level. [People] want to plant vegetables but they choose livestock. (PAs)*

As a result, participants dropped out of the project when they needed to prioritise their livestock over tasks associated with vegetables growing, or when they had gained sufficient income to buy animals and re-engage with this traditional livelihood strategy. In addition, participants grew only the vegetables traditionally eaten by herders, as the PA noted, “*We taught [participants] how to cook the new vegetables but most people don’t eat them, they only plant potatoes, cabbage, carrots and turnips.*”

Staff also identified a top-down leadership style as a barrier to participation. For the DOM, this leadership style meant that in Mongolian society, leaders made decisions, while local people didn’t contribute to the decision making processes, as the DOM expounded:

*Local leadership style is not participatory in any way…. [In Mongolia it’s ] Communist style top-down leadership, [Mongolia] hasn’t really moved away from this…. Shoulder to shoulder egalitarian stuff doesn’t fit well here [and people] won’t
respect it…. People gather around the [leader] and await instructions and what that person says they will do.

In contrast, the Mongolian staff of Project B identified top-down leadership as a barrier because it meant local people wouldn’t work hard in the field without the leader present. For example, the PA reported:

When [project staff] go to another sum some people become lazy. Planting the vegetables requires a lot of labour and some Mongolian people only do work when people are in control over them. When there is nobody in control they stop doing their work.

Therefore for staff, top-down leadership only proved a barrier when it was absent and did not carry out its normative function of ensuring participants worked equally hard.

Free-Riders
Local participants reported that during the large-group activities of breaking in the field and preparing it for planting, free-rider behaviour was evident. Along with others, P 1 and 2 complained about this behaviour:

One problem is when we cleared the field some people are working hard and some people are resting, especially the older and weak people…. Some people don’t care about taking their share of the load and think ‘If we hang around the field and do a little work we will receive flour, oil and vegetables at harvest time,’ ….When we were working all together on the field some people didn’t come to the field to work…some families just sent one person…. However, after each family was given their own piece of land all family members came to work on their own plot and even sent their children to work.

As this quotation shows, free-rider behaviour arose due to differences in physical ability; an expectation that benefits would be provided independent of work duties; and large group activities which gave little incentive to stop participants from adopting free-rider behaviours. Meanwhile, participants suggested that free riding increased when project staff were not present, as P 5 commented, “Some people only do work when they are working besides the PA and when [the PA] goes somewhere else they stop working.”
Other

A smaller number of local participants and staff highlighted other barriers to participation, of which the most prominent were the private lives of participants, the selection of only families registered in the local *sum*, and environmental degradation. Project staff suggested the private lives of participants may limit their participation, as the PAs reported *“When [local people] are working on the field their real family life doesn’t stop. Their heart*<sup>60</sup> *is divided between family life and work…all [participants] are herders so they worry about their livestock.”* In addition, staff pointed out that the project selected only local people registered with the local *sum* government. This excluded a large portion of people, who had moved into the area and failed to register due to the expense involved<sup>61</sup>. Furthermore, the PM, PA, and one participant mentioned that environmental degradation can affect the overall success of the project, as the PA stated, *“We can’t control the weather disasters. Natural disasters, like a drought, influences why people drop out of the project.”*

4.4.4.4 Barriers to Participation in the Cooperative

**Table 10: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Barriers to Participation in the Cooperative in Project B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 4)</th>
<th>Local Participants (n = 6)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free-Riders (2)</td>
<td>Absence of Financial Support (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mistrust (2)</td>
<td>Free-Riders (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mistrust (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Absence of Financial Support**

The absence of financial support from Project B negatively affected participation within the cooperative and its future viability. Firstly, after Project B’s exit, around half of the participants had elected not to join the cooperative. *P3 and 4* explained the reasons for this non-participation:

*Some people wanted it like the project, but it is impossible because during the project everything, such as finance and training came from the project….So some people won’t work in the cooperative because now there is no support.*

<sup>60</sup> The word used here was ‘сэтгэл’, which can be translated as ‘thoughts, heart, mind, feelings, or spirit’ (Global Dictionary, n.d.).

<sup>61</sup> To reregister costs 50,000 *tugricks* per child and 100,000 *tugricks* per adult (personal communication).
Furthermore, cooperative members understood that without the project’s financial backing vegetable growing was now a riskier, and less profitable, livelihood strategy. Cooperative members were now required to finance input costs such as petrol, tractor repairs, and materials. However, attaining sufficient finance had proven difficult, as the LFB reported:

*Finance is a problem. Most of [the cooperative members] are unemployed, only ten percent have paid work, so it’s difficult to organise the cooperative. In addition, all our important inputs and costs for the cooperative, like petrol, have recently doubled.*

In addition, only some of the cooperative members had given the required 15,000 tugricks to pay for these inputs. As a result, the cooperative had taken a high-interest loan from a bank. This meant the cooperatives future viability depended on a substantial harvest from which profits would be used to repay its loan and set aside finances for next season.

Due to these increased financial costs, and the company tax the cooperative would have to pay after harvest, cooperative members sensed that without the project’s support vegetable growing would be significantly less profitable. As a result P 5 commented, “*If the result of the cooperative is bad this year, I won’t work in the cooperative again…I will get out and plant by myself.*”

**Free-Riders**

Staff and cooperative members suggested that free-rider problems had continued despite changes to the group structure under the cooperative. As in the project, in the cooperative all members worked together to prepare the field. However, in the cooperative in place of family units, four work-groups (*brigades*) made up of three or four families continued to plant, water, and harvest on separate plots. As a result, new forms of free riding took place, as P 5 explained:

*The problem in the cooperative is knowing which brigade works well and which doesn’t. [In the] brigade some people come and some don’t so I am not satisfied with the cooperative. During the project whatever family worked hard would receive a large profit. But now in our brigades it may be difficult to divide up the cooperatives harvest amongst ourselves….I shouldn’t have to give my vegetables to someone who didn’t work well.*
As described above, this change to larger, non-kin based work groups meant the potential for both inter-group and intra-group free-rider behaviour existed.

**Mistrust**

Local participants reported that during the project trust between participants had grown, as P 3 and 4 stated, "It was difficult to trust other participant when we first started [in the project] because we weren’t working in groups just with our own family. In the middle of planting we got to know the other participants well. ” However, cooperative members reported mistrust still existed in group-work activities, as P 5 described:

> Recently I went to hospital...when I came back I noticed that some people [in my brigade] did a poor job of watering the vegetables....I kind of trust people in my group and I know I need to trust them but they are not trustworthy enough for me.

**Leadership**

It became apparent during interviews that there was some disgruntlement about the selection process of the cooperatives leader. According to one participant, this decision was not reached through group consensus, as P 5 explained:

> To organise a cooperative everyone must have one spirit – and we don’t have this. All people have different ideas and thoughts. When we had the meeting to choose the leader it was very confusing, all members were divided into two halves...In the end one person made the decision to choose the [LFB] as leader .... I was against choosing him but didn’t say anything because I just want to grow vegetables.

Furthermore, the new cooperative leader had taken on the traditional role of a ‘darag’ within a top-down organisation. Therefore, decisions were to be made by the cooperative leader and based on relationship, rather than a democratic process, as the LFB (the cooperative leader) stated, “I will manage all the activities of the cooperative, and make all the decisions related to the cooperative. In general, on the basis of my relationship with the people I will make decisions.”
4.5 Results of Case Study: ‘Project C’

4.5.1 Introduction and Background to Project C

Project C is a multifaceted development project which simultaneously seeks to empower artisanal small-scale miners[^62] to participate in decision-making processes, while creating institutional structures to enable artisanal mining to become a sustainable, profitable sub-sector of the rural economy. The following section will present results based on interviews with Project C staff and local people associated with the case-study site including one Development Organisation Manager (DOM), one National Project Director (NPD), one Project Manager (PM), one Monitoring and Evaluation Specialist (MES), one Aimag Staff member (AS), one Sum Government Vice-President (SGV), one Sum Project Counterpart (SPC), one Local Facilitator (LF), seven Local Participant Miners (LPM), and four Non-Participant Miners (NPM).

Project C is being facilitated by a bilateral Development Organisation (DO), which has been working in Mongolia since 2001. The DO supplied its own funding for Project C, consisting of US $1.1 million for the ‘orientation phase’ which ran from July, 2005 until December, 2006, and US $3.8 million for the ‘main phase’ which followed and is set to finish in December 2010. ‘Altan[^63]’ the case-study mining site selected for the research, was included as a pilot site during the orientation phase and project activities continue to run there during the main phase.

Large numbers of former herders (approx. 100,000) engage in informal and illegal mining practices throughout Mongolia as a result of poverty caused by large-scale livestock losses in recent years. According to project documentation, these miners make a significant contribution to the rural economy, but are marginalised from society, fail to receive the government’s social support, work in difficult and dangerous conditions, and degrade the environment. Project C’s goal is to contribute to responsible mining in Mongolia by working with all stakeholders to ensure that artisanal miners are recognised as responsible members of a key economic sub-sector contributing to sustainable rural development. To achieve this goal, Project C has four main objectives: firstly, to improve the development of a policy and

[^62]: The term ‘artisanal small-scale miner’ (referred to as ‘miner’ in this section) is used to categorise miners who work informally, and often illegally, in mineral mines in Mongolia.

[^63]: "Altan" or "алтан" means "golden" in Mongolian. The main mineral mined here was gold.
regulatory framework for artisanal mining; secondly, to improve the formation and functioning of institutional structures and organisations at all levels of artisanal mining; thirdly, to strengthen the capacity of mining communities to engage in profitable, responsible mining and further business activities; and fourthly, to empower miners and other resource users to address and solve existing and potential ecological and social conflicts.

4.5.2 How did Stakeholders in Project C Understand the Concept of ‘Participation’?

4.5.2.1 The Practical Realities of Participation

Project Structure

Project structure changed during Project C in order to facilitate a participatory approach. Firstly, implementation of the orientation phase was contracted to a private Western development company, who utilised a team comprising Mongolian and foreign experts. However, this arrangement was criticised as being slow and inefficient by the DO. For example, reporting and fiscal management procedures used differed from the DO’s, the expatriate director had spent only spent 1.5 months out of the 18 in Mongolia, and two-thirds of the budget was spent outside Mongolia.

To encourage a more ‘grass-roots’ approach, a project team was formed within the DO itself to implement the main phase of Project C. Meanwhile, during the orientation phase a special government unit responsible for Artisanal Small-scale Mining (ASM) issues was established, and this ASM unit partnered with the DO to implement this main phase.

At the time of research, Project C had a central office in Ulaanbaatar containing nine staff members including the PM, MES, and other experts, while the ASM unit located in the government consisted of five professional staff members (including the NPD). In connection with the case-study site, Altan, Project C had two staff members at the aimag level, one staff member at the sum level, and one local facilitator living at Altan, while “…about 120 miners, in twelve groups participated in the project” (AS).

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64 Data obtained for this section is from both the project’s documentation and interviews.
65 One was the ASM unit’s representative at the aimag government working part-time for Project C, and the other one was employed fulltime by the DO (the AS interviewed).
66 This local staff member was an employee of the sum government and worked part-time for Project C (the SCP interviewed).
Project Identification, Planning, and Preparation

Project C was identified by the DO in response to increasing environmental and social issues associated with the rise of ASM in Mongolia. This issue was taken up by the DO as it fitted within the DO’s target group (vulnerable herders and ex-herders in Western aimags) and its main thematic focus of sustainable natural resource management. Following this identification, the DO conducted field appraisals and desk studies concluding that herders forced into ASM were kept in poverty due to a lack of legal and policy instruments, technological constraints, and inappropriate organisational structures.

During this orientation phase the Altan mining site was selected by staff and experts (Mongolian and foreign) to pilot Project C’s activities, and collect information which would assist in the planning and preparation of the main phase of the project. This meant project staff and international consultants routinely visited Altan to conduct research and baseline measurements, and Altan was the trial site for organisational restructuring and new technology. Meanwhile, Altan miners and local officials participated in PRA style workshops and meetings within these activities and as a way of providing feedback to project staff.

Through the orientation phase Project C conducted large numbers of participatory workshops, meetings, and forums with secondary stakeholders. These stakeholders included bilateral and multilateral development organisations, national and foreign experts, and national government members. Project documentation reported that such meetings enabled a wide range of stakeholders to influence the planning and preparation for Project C’s main phase.

Expert Influences

Project staff reported that foreign consultants and experts helped shape the project’s direction. Firstly, the PM stated that, based on foreign experts’ experiences in Latin America and Africa, the project believed artisanal miners (ex-herders) would remain mining, rather than return to the livestock sector, “…although, miners say they will get out of [mining] and return to livestock if they make money” (PM). Thus, expert information, rather than miner participation, had helped shaped the project’s objectives.

Secondly, arising from exchanges with international consultants, Project C made steps towards a more participatory approach in the main implementation phase. For example, project documentation reports that at one such exchange staff learnt that the ‘bottom up approach should be mainstreamed at all levels of the project implementation’. This bottom up
approach was described as a ‘social process’ entailing ‘supporting people to overcome constraints,’ ‘not providing something for free,’ ‘starting from where people are,’ ‘seeing people holistically,’ and ‘listening to people not telling them.’ As a result of such advice, some two years into the project, aimag- and sum-based staff were employed.

This move to a more ‘participatory approach’ was highlighted in interviews with managerial staff, “One of our pending actions that we have is to really implement a participatory community approach,” (NPD). Staff understood this to mean “…the project will build capacity [at Altan] so miners can initiate everything and make their own decisions” (PM). This increased emphasis on the ‘participatory approach’ had also resulted in the appointment of a new project manager to Project C. This new PM explained the recent changes in the Project C’s direction:

We are trying to use the participatory approach. The project started in August 2005. Since then the project has used this approach but there hasn’t been very good success so far because the project doesn’t have the capacity to use this approach…. So we have been working hard now since last April…. We have invited many international consultants …and organising community management workshops at the upper level. The concept should be that [the miners] initiate everything. We just changed the project manager because [the last PM] tried but didn’t implement the participatory approach. So it’s hard for us to say [the miners] made this or that decision and because of [the miners ’] decisions the project has gone this way.

The AS reported that he had recently been involved in these community management workshops. However, staff closest to the miners, such as the SCP and LF, had as yet not received any training in the bottom-up approach, even though project documentation reported that that aimag and sum governments, and Project C staff lacked the necessary facilitation skills and knowledge on the participatory approach to conduct community development with artisanal miners.

Activities

Project C’s past and current activities were aimed at modifying an existing livelihood strategy rather than the introduction of completely new livelihood options. These activities included the establishment of a legal framework, the founding of institutional, the organising of the

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67 This occurred during the researcher’s time in Mongolia. Originally a date had been set to meet with the former PM, but he had been replaced before such a meeting could be conducted.
mining site, and workshops. Activities at Altan had begun in the orientation phase and were continuing through the main project phase. However, activities had either stagnated due to staffs’ incapacity to use the ‘participatory approach’ and other commitments, or been modified as a result of Project C’s new emphasis on a ‘bottom-up’ approach. Furthermore, this new emphasis on “…only supporting miners initiatives and activities” (AS) meant Project C had no set time table for the implementation of activities.

Since its inception, Project C undertook the process of having a new law on ASM passed by the Mongolian government. The purpose of this law was to bring regulation and legality to the ASM industry, enabling local governments to contract land to miners, collect tax, and provide social services. During the orientation phase, a task force consisting of a legal advisory board, ministerial staff, and Project C staff drafted a new artisanal mining law. Project documentation reports that this task force ‘conducted numerous meetings and workshops with stakeholders on all administrative levels to guarantee this regulatory framework was drafted through a participatory process’.

This draft law was presented to Altan miners and aimag and sum officials at ‘PRA workshops’, where those present commented on the law and formulated their own needs and suggestions. Altan miners were also given the opportunity to attend a National Mining Forum in Ulaanbaatar where this draft law was further discussed. Although, the AS commented that “the miners’ voice strongly influenced the creation of the law” during interviews, none of the miners mentioned any opportunities to contribute to the law, or even the draft law itself. At the time of research a new ASM law was not yet passed68 but in March 2008 an interim government regulation on ASM was put into effect.

National and local institutional structures were founded by Project C to facilitate the participation of stakeholders in ASM issues. Firstly, within the governmental division responsible for the mining sector a unit dedicated to ASM had been established. This ASM unit worked as a government counterpart to the Project and provided the ASM sector (and therefore Altan miners) with representation in the government. In addition, aimag and sum government officials were chosen as members of this ASM unit and provided Project C with further representation at the local level. Secondly, an ASM regulation council was established at Altan. Project documentation produced in January 2007 stated that local miners had to be included in this council to make it a participatory institution. However, by the time of research

68 It was reported that recent political instability in Mongolia had slowed the process.
this had not occurred, with Altan’s ASM regulation council consisting of “...the sum governor, sum vice-governor, sum project counterpart, bag leaders, school principal, doctors, environmental protection agent, and the tax inspector” (SPC).

Project C’s main activity was the organisation of Altan so that miners would eventually join together to form an institutional structure that would be recognised by the local government and represent the collective interest of the miners. Initially, a ‘trial’ organisation of Altan called a ‘Micro Project’ had taken place during the orientation phase of the project following discussions with aimag and sum government officials, the ASM regulation council, and the miners themselves. During this organisation miners were registered to work-groups\(^69\), and the land at Altan was sectioned up and each work group was given their own plot of land on which to continue mining. Meanwhile, Project C had negotiated with the current owners of the Altan’s land license, a mining company, to secure permission for the use of Altan. In addition, a local ‘leader’ was selected by the project from among the miners to facilitate this group-work on group plots. However, miners reported such organisation had failed to continue because Project Staff and the local leader had been absent from Altan for lengthy periods at a time.

During the time of research, the organisation and regulation of Altan was taking place within the framework of the interim government regulation. This regulation gave local governments the framework to regulate and organise ASM sites through the registration of miners and contracting of land to miner work groups. At Altan passports/licences\(^70\) were being granted only to full-time miners who were members of work groups, and citizens of the local sum. Moreover, only miners with this licence would be able to work at Altan. For Altan miners, participation in the project, and the procurement of a mining licence had morphed into one and the same activity, especially since the most visible project staff member, the SPC was a local government official. Hence, local miners would only be able to continue in their current livelihood strategies if they participated in the project.

This regulation and organisation of Altan, was being conducted by a new local leader (the LF), who was to distribute passports, meet with group leaders, and act as their bridge to the

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\(^69\) Miners had been working in work-groups of seven to ten members prior to the project’s implementation. These work groups were informal, flexible labour units consisting of friends and relatives (tandag humus), with the leader usually the oldest relative or most influential friend.

\(^70\) Miners and staff used the terms 'үнэмлэх,' 'зөбшөөрөх,' and 'баримт' interchangeably which can translate as licence or passport.
project’s staff. This LF was chosen by project staff rather than being elected by the miners. According to the PM, this particular former-miner was selected because “most of the ninjas think that he is the most influential person down there...he has animals...and is well-known in the sum.” However, there was confusion as to the LF’s exact role at Altan. While the PM stated, “He is not leading the groups...[or] telling people how to work [or] organising people...he is mediating between problems and distributing information,” the LF (confirmed by the AS, SPC, and local miners) reported his role was to, “…lead...and organise the miners and the miner work groups.”

During the project, training had been delivered to miners at Project C’s own ger in Altan by Ulaanbaatar and aimag staff during their visits to the mining site. Training topics included group-work, health and safety, and mining practices, while the project continued to provide the miners with books on these topics. However miners and staff reported the frequency of training had decreased in recent years.

The Project’s current activity at Altan was to encourage the mining groups to join together to form a “participatory decision-making institutions” (AS) such as an NGO, a cooperative, or an unregistered partnership. It was then hoped this institution would be able to further negotiate with the local government and use the pooled funds and resources of its members to improve gold returns and establish further small enterprises. In order for this to occur, the AS member had initiated workshops on this process and was planning future meetings with miners to facilitate this process.

4.5.2.2 Theoretical Understandings of Participation

Ulaanbaatar- and Aimag- Based Staff – ‘Participation as Decision Making and Empowerment’

Staff understood that participation meant miners made decisions within the project which would result in their empowerment, i.e. the increased ability to make decisions outside the project. Hence, participation was seen as both the means and end result of Project C. Decision making, however, was still controlled by staff.

71 Miners were also referred to as ‘Ninjas’ by staff and miners alike. This term had become common-place in Mongolian society, and had risen because when miners placed gold-pans on their backs and ran away from Mining company land they had reminded people of the cartoon characters the ‘Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.’
Staff categorised Project C as a ‘participatory rural development project’, which meant miners would make decisions that affected the project’s activities. However, the measure to which miners’ decisions affected the project was understood diversely by staff members, as the following statements show:

[The project] can’t teach the miners what to do. We should initiate what they want.... So participation means [miners] will initiate everything and they will make their own decisions...not only the boss but the entire [mining] community. (PM)

Local community views, experiences, knowledge, and culture should be taken into account in [Project C]. The local miners should be part and partners of the development of [Altan]. They should implement parts of the project and be provided with opportunities to implement their own initiatives. (MES)

Give [the miners] a voice...[and] power not just to benefit from the project but to decide what they want the benefits to be. (DOM)

Participation means that everyone who is somehow involved in the issue to be solved is at least asked or involved in the decision-making. Participation means you are trying to go down to the grass-roots, understand their logic, pick them up... and help them to develop. (NPM)

Usually the miners come to decisions by themselves but we have to help them make the correct decisions. (AS)

Thus, understandings on decision making were at the ‘empowering’ end of a typology of participation including self mobilisation (the PM), interactive partnerships (the MES and OM), and functional involvement (the NPM and AS). Meanwhile, staff all agreed that the local miners’ role was to make decisions which influenced Project C’s activities and overall activities.

Following recent workshops, staff linked local participation to ‘bottom-up’ or ‘grass-roots’ development. Such an approach meant that Project C’s activities were based on “miners strengths and skills,” (PM) and “…existing resources,” (MES) rather than the distribution of outside resources, i.e. technology, and tools. However, this meant the project would only support certain local decisions, as the MES explained:
Project C is not a project that gives or distributes things. But we will support [miner] initiatives. Provision of material benefits is not the objective of the project. Depending on the nature of the initiatives, discussions amongst project staff and related stakeholders will make the final decision in relation to material benefits (sic).

As this quote shows because Project C was ‘grass-roots’, once miner initiatives involved material goods, these decisions would have to be ratified from above.

The empowerment of miners was understood to come about by their participation in Project C. This empowerment was seen as the increased capacity and opportunity for miners to engage in decision making which affected their livelihoods. As a result, decision making (participation) within Project C would snowball to improved decision-making capacity and increased decision-making opportunities (participation) within society. Hence, local participation was seen by staff as both an activity and result of Project C.

To accomplish this empowerment, the project sought to build the decision-making capacity of miners, as the PM explained:

*We should initiate what the miners want. In order to make them initiate things themselves we need to build capacity [at Altan]. If we wait for their initiation they don’t do anything. The support from the project should be building capacity down there to participate in the process of decision making.*

To build decision-making capacity, Project C provided miners with knowledge on topics such as ASM issues, technical solutions, the environment situation at Altan, group work, and collective action. Moreover, the project built capacity by strengthening existing work groups and encouraged these groups to join together into participatory institutions, such as an NGO or a cooperative. These institutions would then provide miners with a united, representative voice, more capable of engaging with the government and influencing decisions.

Staff also understood that participation in Project C was not limited to Altan miners but included authoritarian structures, such as the local and national government. The participation of authoritarian structures was needed for empowerment of the miners to take place, as the OM explained:
We understand participation is not just the local people; it’s from the government to the local people…. When we just have the grass roots people making the decisions, then [local people] are not empowered from above. Then the decision is not fully worthy. So we…integrate the different levels of authority into the decision-making process with participation. Only when those that actually make decisions at the higher level are involved and owning the process and they honour and respect the decisions made by local people and follow them, only then will you see real empowerment.

As the quotation shows, for the empowerment of miners, authoritarian structures would need to listen, respect, and put into effect the miners’ decisions. Hence, the project’s role was also to provide opportunities for miners’ decisions to be represented within authoritarian structures. Thus, the project focused on advocating for miners within government by creating linkages between miners and decision makers through workshops and forums, establishing a legal framework, and creating an ASM unit within the Ministry of Mining.

Regarding the staffs’ responsibilities the words “facilitate” and “assist” were repeatedly used in interviews, as the MES reported, “The project only facilitates the process of community development at Altan.” Rural-based staff, such as the LF, SPC, and AS facilitated the miners to make decisions within the project through workshops, encouraging, and organising. This facilitation was needed to make ‘good decisions’, as the MES stated “The project assists miners to access information and knowledge, and acquire certain skills…to make good decisions” (MES). In addition, primarily Ulaanbaatar- and aimag-based staff were to undertake advocacy work within authoritarian structures which facilitated opportunities for miners to make decisions. However, staff also controlled participation as they had the final say on what constituted a ‘good’ decision, evidenced by the AS description of his role:

I gather data and decisions from the miners, what exactly they need and send it to the experts. I deliver to the miners the decisions and information that comes from the experts. I am a bridge between the experts and miners.

Thus, decisions of miners needed approval from above before they could shape project activities. Hence, to an extent Ulaanbaatar-based staff exerted top-down control over the project.
Field Staff (LF and SPC)\textsuperscript{72}. ‘Participation as Group Work and Organisation’

Field staff understood that miners were to participate in Project C according to the framework which the new interim regulatory law provided. For example, they reported:

\begin{quote}
I understand that participation in Project C is related to the government resolution. The countryside is ruined everywhere, so the people are gathered together and are being organised. (LF)
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Participation in Project C is group labour...before we had the Negdel and after this broke up it is still necessary for everyone to work together.... It’s not development if people are working in ones and twos. (SPC)
\end{quote}

Hence, for field staff, participation equated to group work that would bring much needed organisation and control to Altan, which was “messy, disorganised…and environmentally degraded” (SPC).

The project’s role was therefore seen as bringing organisation to Altan, through organising miners into groups, distributing land, and the issuing of miner passports. As such, field staff saw their main role as bringing organisation and control rather than facilitation, as the LF reported:

\begin{quote}
The project staff said, ‘[The LF] is your leader, you must obey him and do as he says’. So I am now the leader.... My job is to gather the miners into one place... and organise people...meet with the group leaders...and distribute passports.
\end{quote}

According to field staff, decision making in Project C occurred bottom-up but within a top-down structure. Group leaders would meet together with the LF and then any decisions, ideas, or requests would be transferred to a higher authoritarian structure for approval. These structures included the sum ASM council, aimag and Ulaanbaatar staff, which field staff identified as having control in Project C. In addition, the field staff acted as a bridge between miners and these powerful structures. However, according to the LF, “The work groups are not making any decisions or doing anything themselves,” because authoritarian structures were slow in responding, and miners had been unwilling to take control, as the SPC reported, “The miners think they should have less control in the project.”

\textsuperscript{72} Both the SCP and LF were closest in location to Altan, the SCP lived in the sum’s centre (15km’s from Altan), while the LF lived at Altan. Both these project members reported they had not received training in ‘community management’, or the ‘bottom-up approach’. 
Participant Miners – ‘Participation to Ensure Livelihood Continuation’

Interviews with participant miners showed that for them, Project C and working on the gold fields at Altan had morphed into the same entity. This was because miners associated Project C with the regulation of Altan following the recent interim government law. For miners, participation in Project C, or adherence to the new regulations, had become essential to the continuation of their current livelihood strategy. Thus, miners understood participation to involve labour in registered work groups at Altan, as the following replies to the question ‘How are you involved?’ highlight:

*I am involved in a work group. (P5)*

*I am a volunteer in the project because my life requires it….I work together with others in a group. (LPM 3)*

*I joined a group with seven of my relatives to participate in the project….If we take the passport we have the right to work at Altan. (LPM 7)*

*I am in a group of eight people, consisting of close relatives, but today there is just four of us. Our leader has a passport and I will have to take a passport. (LPM 6)*

In addition, some miners reported that participation involved attending project meetings. However, these meetings were not seen as a space to participate in decisions about the project, but rather as a place to glean information, i.e. listen to decisions; and register to participate in Project C, i.e. work at Altan. Therefore, participation was seen as a tool which enabled miners to continue working in Altan, rather than as a means to make decisions which altered the project’s direction.

Participant miners understood that their role was not to make decisions, but that decision-making power, and therefore the overall control of Project C, resided within internal and external structures of authority. Internal control was held by work group leaders and the LF. Firstly, within work groups, group leaders were seen as the decision makers, as P5 recalled, “*Project participants aren’t participating in the project only the group leaders are….The LF only gathers group leaders and they talk about the problems at Altan and make decisions.*” Meanwhile, the LF was the organiser and controller of work groups, as he was responsible for the distribution of passports to miners. The LF was also seen as the bridge to the more

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73 None of the miners interviewed understood their roles as making decisions, controlling, or directing the project.
powerful external structures of authority, termed “...the voice of the local participants” (LPM 7). As such a bridge, the LF presented the miners’ requests and decisions to structures of authority, and brought information, including decision ratifications, back to the miners.

Participant miners, however, understood that external structures of authority, the local government, and aimag and Ulaanbaatar staff held overall decision-making power and hence control of Project C and therefore Altan. Firstly, the local government, which included the ASM unit’s staff member74 (the SPC), was seen as controlling the day-to-day running of Altan, through the issuing of licences, as LPM 3 stated, “The local government are in control of Altan.” An example of this was the recent introduction of a tractor to work at Altan, an idea which came from miners but needed the support of the SPC for it to stand. Secondly, miners understood that “the project staff control the project and make decisions” (LPM 5) through a centralised decision-making process, as LPM 3 explained:

The SPC and the AS come to Altan and ask, ‘what are your problems, what are your needs, what do you want?’ Then they join all the requests together and send them to Ulaanbaatar.

Thus, participant miners understood decision making and therefore power, was held at Project headquarters in Ulaanbaatar. In addition, top down decision-making processes and external control was normative to miners, as LPM 6 stated, “The project staff must manage the miners and give them guidance and direction and give the participants practical things to do.” However, it was only when the project failed to deliver on promises, or establish relationship ties, did participant miners begrudge such a top-down structure (see Section: 4.5.4.2).

Miners interviewed did not link empowerment, as defined by staff, to their participation within Project C’s activities. Miners did not see their role as making decisions, but rather making requests which were subjected to approval from external structures of authority. Meanwhile, empowering institutions such as the work groups had existed prior to the project founded on increased work efficiency rather than increased decision-making capacity. In addition, only a small number of miners thought collective action institutions, such as an NGO or cooperative were possible at Altan. Furthermore, these miners linked such

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74 The SPC had dual roles; he was both the secretary of the people’s representative committee in the sum government (i.e. third in-charge) and a staff member of Project C as the local representative of the government’s ASM unit.
institutions to the provision of physical benefits, such as a shower house or gold factory, rather than a vehicle for representation in decision-making spaces.

4.5.2.3 The Language of Participation

Development Organisation Terminology

Within its policy documents the DO uses language and phrases which indicate that ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’ are priorities for its development initiatives. The DO lists ‘participation’ as a core value, defined as ‘sharing knowledge, resources and decisions with our partners,’ and used ‘participation’ in conjunction with other ethical words such as ‘trust’ and ‘respect’. In addition, within Mongolian-based development initiatives, empowerment and participation are seen as part of the ‘rights-based approach’ which the DO employs. Thus, empowerment of the disadvantaged is listed as a key mandate, and defined as supporting people so they can build confidence in and develop their own initiatives and capabilities. Furthermore, the DO states such that empowerment is facilitated by involving beneficiaries in all stages of the project which will lead to ownership of development assistance by stakeholders.

‘Participation’

Project staff, miners\(^{75}\), and documentation used the generic terms for participation, ‘оролцох’ (ohrulzokh) and ‘хамрах’ (hamrakh), to describe local peoples’ role in the project. Additionally, some miners used the term ‘идэвхтйэ’ (idekhtie), to emphasise that they were ‘actively’ participating within the work groups, while other miners also used the term, ‘хамтдаа ажиллаар’\(^{76}\) (hamtdaa ajulaar) which means ‘working together’ to describe the group’s function. Importantly, these terms idekhtie, hamrakh, and hamtdaa ajulaar were used to connect miners’ participation within groups to physical work/labour, rather than a group decision-making process. In addition, management staff and documentation described Project C’s approach as a ‘оролцооны аргаар олон нийтийг хөгжүүлэх арга барил’ or a ‘participatory community development approach.’ However, sum staff and miners were confused as to what this term meant when asked during interviews.

The DOM, a foreigner with fifteen years work experience in Mongolia, suggested other Mongolian terms could be, and had been used to denote ‘participation’ within rural

\(^{75}\) However, miners were often vague as to whether they were participating in the project (see Section: 4.5.4.2).

\(^{76}\) This term was also used within Project C’s information brochures designed for artisanal miners’ use.
development projects. These terms utilised the word ‘ёие биеээнээ’ (be beinday) which means ‘one another,’ or ‘with one another.’ For example, be beinday ‘оруулга’ (to involve or include one another), be beinday ‘хүлээн зөвшөөрөх’ (to be accountable to one another), and be beinday ‘дэмжих’ (to support or cooperate with one another) (Global Dictionary, n.d.).

‘Empowerment’

Ulaanbaatar-based staff and project documentation used the term чадваржуулж (chadvarjoohlaj) to describe the ‘empowerment’ of miners. However, within interviews and casual conversations with sum-based staff and miners the term chadvarjoohlaj was not once used to describe a resulting benefit of participating in the project, although one miner noted, “Us miners don’t have enough chadvarjoohlaj to establish an NGO here” (LPM 6).

‘Groups’

Project staff referred to the work groups by the generic term бүлэг (bulag). In addition, a number of staff also added an adjective, so that groups were called ‘нөхөрлөл бүлэг’, or ‘friendship group’. Field-based staff, the LF, and some miners, however, commonly referred to these work groups as brigade, a term which carries the notion of a unit dedicated to labour, not decision-making (see Section 4.4.2.3). Meanwhile, some local miners did not associate their joint labour to ‘work groups’ but simply stated that they worked with ‘наизнууд’ (friends), ‘хамаатанууд’ (relatives) and tandag humuus. While project documentation reported that in other ASM sites miners had called work groups ‘гал’ (translated as ‘fire’), i.e. groups sharing the same fireplace or ger, within interviews and conversations at Altan this term was not used.

The leaders of the work groups were commonly referred to by miners as дарга (darag) which translates as ‘boss’ (see Section: 4.4.2.3). The LF, called a ‘facilitator’ by Ulaanbaatar-based staff, was referred to as darag by miners and local staff alike, with many miners referring to him as the ‘творлний дарга’ or ‘project boss’. Thus, the language Altan miners used suggest that the work groups’ originating purpose of labour efficiency, rather than decision-making, was still prioritised by Altan miners.

77 Other variations of the term include ‘ёие биеээнээ’ and ‘ёие биеэдээ’.
4.5.3 What did Stakeholders in Project C Perceive as the Benefits of Participation?

The perceptions of the benefits of participating in Project C bore stark contrasts across the three main stakeholder groups (see Table: 11). Project staff understood benefits in terms of empowerment; government workers in terms of organisation and control; while local people reported no significant benefits existed. Hence, each stakeholder’s perceptions will be presented separately in the Sections: 4.5.3.1.1 to 4.5.3.1.3. Meanwhile, stakeholder understandings of non-local benefits will be outlined in Section: 4.5.3.1.4

4.5.3.1 Stakeholder Perceptions of the Benefits of Project C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 5)</th>
<th>Sum Government Workers (n = 278)</th>
<th>Local People (n = 1079)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empowerment (5)</td>
<td>Organisation and Control80 (2)</td>
<td>No Real Benefits (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal Framework (5)</td>
<td>Group work (2)</td>
<td>Other – project ger (6),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>books (5), organisation (2),</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Support (5)</td>
<td>Materials (2)</td>
<td>group work (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Materials (4)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Changed Mental Attitude (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organisation (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety (2)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

4.5.3.1.1 Project Staff

Empowerment

All staff members either directly or indirectly identified empowerment of the Altan miners as a major benefit of Project C, as the NPD stated, “The most important benefit is that miners change their mental model, that they are empowered.” Staff understood that empowerment occurred when miners had the capacity and opportunity to engage in decisions which affected their livelihood. Thus, the other benefits identified (legal framework, government support, 78 This includes the SVG and the SPC.
79 This includes the LF, six LPMs, and three NPMs.
80 Although this benefit was termed a ‘local’ benefit by the government workers it was in fact primarily a benefit for the government.
etc.) by staff typically either increased the decision-making capacity of miners, or provided further opportunities for local miners to influence decisions.

**Legal Framework**

All staff agreed that the establishment of a legal framework in order to regulate the ASM industry was a benefit of Project C. Although a law was yet to be passed, early in 2008 the Mongolian government had passed an interim government regulation. This regulation recognised ASM as a legal economic activity, and made provision for Ninja brigades to contract with the local government to conditionally mine specific areas. According to staff and documentation, Project C had created space, through workshops and seminars, for Ninjas to contribute to the formation of this legal framework.

Staff in management positions acknowledged the establishment of a legal framework had proved difficult. For example, the DOM stated, “It’s a challenge because there is a difference in respect and vision [between the government and the Ninjas]...so the initial progress is a little slower.” In addition, the PM queried whether the regulation was “what the Ninjas really wanted. [Because] we just went there and told the Ninjas ‘You need a legal framework.’” Meanwhile, local government workers reported that regulation of the Altan mine had not yet taken place at the grass-roots level.

**Government Support**

Staff understood that increased government support of the ASM sector was a benefit of Project C. An ASM division had been established within the National Government’s MPRAM (Ministry of Resource and Petroleum Authority), and according to the DOM, this structure enabled miners to be empowered from above:

*Both the government and the local people need to be involved in the decision-making. Because we find out that when we just have the grass-roots people making the decisions they are not empowered from above and then their decisions are not fully worthy....We built an artisanal mining division at the [MPRAM] as well as organising the Ninjas at the grass-roots level and now the decisions are made within these structures.*
In addition, staff pointed out that an improved relationship between Ninjas and the government had resulted. This was evidenced by a change in the government’s mindset towards ASM, as MES stated:

*Project C has done a lot of advocacy work on ASM issues, so now the government looks seriously at ASM as an issue...and recognises it as an economic activity....Project C has [shown] the Ninjas how to cooperate and get support from the local government, and has established mutually trusting relationships between them (local government and Ninjas).*

As a result of this increase in government support and change in mindset staff reported, “Ninjas are now working together with the local government” (AS).

**Knowledge**

Staff also saw knowledge, including mining, empowering, and social knowledge, as a benefit for local miners from Project C. Firstly, the project, through seminars, peer-to-peer learning, and books,\(^{81}\) delivered knowledge on ‘best practice’ mining techniques to local participants. These ‘best practice’ techniques contained information on new technology, safety rules, environmental recovery, group work, and conflict resolution, which would ensure “that the gold recovery is better” (MES).

Staff also suggested that Ninjas acquired knowledge from Project C which would lead to their empowerment. Firstly, Ninjas received information on which to base their decisions, as NPD stated, “The [miners] are able to collect information...process it...systematise it and use it for their problems. Only this way can people get real power.” Secondly, miners received workshops on the formation of NGOs and cooperatives; and “…now knew that they needed to work together...and make their own decisions” (AS) within these structures.

In addition, staff reported that Ninjas had benefitted from increased knowledge about their social situations, as the PM explained:

*[The miners] understand that they are harming themselves as they don’t have health and social insurance, they are not sending their kids to school, and they are harming the environment. So this is the achievement we have: We made [miners] understand that while they are trying to make their life better they are actually harming*
themselves and others...So they really want to cooperate with the project now and solve their problems.

According to the PM such a social enlightenment facilitated miners’ further participation in the project.

Materials
The ‘cultural’ ger, books, and permission to work at Altan, were identified by staff as the material benefits of Project C. However, staff also realised that miners expected different material benefits from the project, as the AS reported:

*The miners always say bad things about the project. They say ‘You don’t give us anything. You are always talking about empowerment. Stop talking about empowerment and just give us flour or a goat.’*

However, according to staff, Project C was not willing to provide more substantial material benefits, for example MES pointed out, “The provision of material benefits is not the objective of Project C. Project C is not a project that gives or distributes things but we support their (miners’) initiatives.”

Changed Mental Attitude
Staff reported that a change in mental attitude of society towards miners, as well as a change in attitude on part of the miners, as a benefit of project C. Firstly, society had changed its view on miners from seeing them as “waste,” (AS) and “destroyers of the environment, criminals, and prostitutes,” (NPD) to economically contributing members of rural society. As a result of “knowing they are part of society” (MES), staff reported that miners now had “a positive attitude,” and “wanted to do responsible mining” (PM).

Staff also reported that miners’ “mental model” (NPD) had now widened to include governmental structures and regulations. For example, the DOM suggested miners were beginning to understand that “…order and regulation of the industry was needed.” Meanwhile, the NPD stated that miners were becoming “aware that they have to link the attention of the politicians to the [mining] situation.” Furthermore, as the project provided

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82 The project Staff referred to the project-gifted ger at Altan as the ‘cultural’ ger.
83 The word used here was  ‘хог’ (khok) which translates as rubbish, trash, or litter (Global Dictionary).
more opportunities for miners to interact with local and national government staff, this mental change was accompanied by an increase in miners’ social connections.

**Organisation**

Staff perceived organisation of the *Altan* miners into work-groups and a future NGO as benefits of Project C. Firstly, the organisation of miners into work groups on group plots of land was seen to increase productivity, as MES stated, “*Project C assists [miners] to organise themselves in order to improve their work efficiency.*” Meanwhile, the formation of a future NGO was understood by staff as a benefit as it would “*protect the miners, and...increase their profits... [While] this organisation will be able to represent their voice to the government and protect their interests*” (AS).

However, project staff noted that organisation was, as yet, only a partial benefit of Project C, as “work groups were present before the project began implementation,” (PM) and “...the miners in [Altan] have failed to organise an NGO” (AS).

**Safety**

Project staff reported a safe working environment at *Altan* as a benefit of Project C. According to the aimag Staff member, because of workshops and information books, Ninjas had safer work practices which had resulted in decreased crush accidents.

**4.5.3.1.2 Sum Government Workers**

**Organisation and Control**

Both *sum* government workers identified the organisation and control of the mining site as the primary local benefit of Project C, as the SVG stated, “*This project helps to control and organise them (miners).*” According to the government workers, prior to Project C, “*miners were very messy and disorganised...lots of drinking and plenty of small crime,*” (SPC) and “*...going everywhere, to all different places*” (SVG). As a result, “*it was necessary to organise them (the miners) and control them*” (SPC). The primary method used to bring about organisation and control was the regulation of miner groups through the issuing of miner licences, as the SPC explained:

*On the project land, only members of groups can work. Only those who have a licence can work on the project land. They must be genuine people from this sum.... We (the local government) give the licence only to the project participants...so we can now*
control those who have a licence. It was necessary to organise the miners into groups and therefore control them.

Thus, because licenses could only be issued to individuals registered to the local sum, Project C had made steps to ensure benefits derived from mining at Altan went solely to local residents.

**Group Work**

Government workers pointed out that the organisation of miners into groups and an NGO was a benefit of Project C. As well as making it easier for the local government to control the mining site, the formation of work groups had meant “people working in groups have been able to find more gold than if they work as individuals” (SPC). Meanwhile, work groups played a social function as “in the groups people learn together, work together and have fellowship together” (SPC). Furthermore, due to Project C’s interventions, the SPC felt that, “Miners now have the capabilities of organising an NGO.” However, the SVG disputed this, stating “It is impossible to establish an NGO because the gold reserves will finish soon.”

**Materials**

Both government workers identified the ‘project’ ger that contained a television, radio, and books on mining, as the material benefits of Project C. According to the SPC, Project C should not provide material benefits to ensure participation:

> Compared to other projects we don’t give the participants material things. So the individual activity of participants has increased and this has facilitated the project. There aren’t any tangible benefits at the moment. In the future the project’s results will be tangible for the Ninjas, a tractor and clothes, etc. (SPC)

The SPC understood, therefore, that a lack of material benefits would facilitate the Ninjas’ participation, which would bring future tangible benefits. In addition, Project C had secured permission from the mining company for the miners to continue work at Altan; hence land was also described as a material benefit.

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84 Sum government workers and local people referred to the project-gifted ger as the ‘Project’s ger’ instead of the ‘Cultural ger’.
4.5.3.1.3 Local People

No Real Benefits

Nine out of the ten local people interviewed, including project miners and non-project miners, were adamant that participating in Project C brought no real benefits. For example, in response to questions regarding the benefits and impacts of Project C, local people stated:

- After participating in the project there are no real changes, before I was working like this and I am still working the same....Nobody feels the effects of the project. There are no benefits; there is no change and no improvements at all! (LPM 6)

- I am a group leader…I don’t know any impacts of the project. (LPM 4)

- Even when the project wasn’t here, working on the goldfields was still profitable. Whether the project was here or not here the benefits would be the same. (LPM 5)

- The project is ineffective. First there were a lot of [miners] here and now it is decreasing. This project is not necessary in the future. (LF)

- There are no benefits of the project, so I don’t want to join. (NPD)

Furthermore, what these statements do not capture is the anger and resentment over the lack of project benefits which a number of interviewees communicated indirectly through body language and tone.

Other

Local people, after initially stating there were no benefits, did, however, recall some benefits of Project C. Local people were quick to point to the ‘Project ger’ as a benefit, although, it was unclear as to the purpose of the ger. For example, interviewees reported that it was either a place for the LF to sit, a kindergarten, or a place to meet with project staff.

After prompting two miners reported that Project C had brought organisation and safety to Altan, as LPM 7 stated, “The big benefits are working in an organised way and safety.”

Firstly, the project had brought organisation by dividing up the land at Altan and distributing individual plots to each group. LPM 7 explained the change, “Before there was never any organisation on the mine. There were a lot of problems about land and people were arguing with each other, and fighting. Now this situation has changed…the project has distributed land.” Furthermore, Altan was now a safer working environment because “Before we were
working in deep holes, now it has changed, we bring the soil up with a tractor” (LPM 7) which meant there was less chance of a crush incident. However, other participants pointed out that miners, rather than Project C had hired the tractor, with permission for the tractor to work Altan coming from the SPC.

From further question prompts, a few participant miners later recognised that group work was a benefit of Project C, “the biggest benefit of the project is everyone working together and helping each other out” (LPM 5). Participant miners understood that working in groups increased the efficiency of their work, as well as insuring a safer working environment, as described by LPM 5:

> It’s profitable joining together and working together. If we are working together people protect each other ....If one person falls into the pit, then everyone is there to pull him out. If the weak person has a shock or difficulty then people help each other out, one person makes tea and another calls the hospital. This is a benefit!

**No Real Benefits - Continued**

The majority of local people reported that materials, groups, and land, described as benefits by project staff and government workers, were in fact pre-existing or ineffectual benefits. For example, LPM 6 stated, “It hasn’t changed as the project staff said. The distribution of the land, the tools and the organising of the groups hasn’t really changed.”

Firstly, local people did not see a clear purpose for the project ger, and were rather angry that this was the only material benefit from Project C. For instance, many interviewees echoed LPM 2’s comment, “The project just gives us one project ger and nothing else. At first people were happy with the project but now they are angry because all they have received is this ger.” In addition, during interviews, Project C’s mining books were never spontaneously identified as a benefit; while interviewees admitted they had read only a few books. Furthermore, these books had brought about limited changes to the mining activity, as local people explained:

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85 Four mining information books produced by Project C were taken from the project ger and shown to five participant miners. From these five, three miners had read none of the books, one had read one of the books, and one had read two of the books.
I read one book earlier about mining gold. That book gave me understanding about how to work at the gold mine with the new tools and technology. We don’t try to implement the new technology, we read about it but we didn’t try. (LPM 5)

Every time the project staff come they are giving books – lots of different books! People have only read the safety rules, but the other [books] aren’t important so they don’t read them and pay attention to them. No material benefits except this ger! Nothing! (LF)

As these quotations show local people failed to identify mining books as an effective material benefit because they had no direct impact on the profitability of activities.

While other stakeholders highlighted group work as a benefit of Project C, the majority of local people interviewed did not. According to many local people interviewed, work groups had existed prior to the project, as LPM 6 stated, “Before the project people were working in groups consisting of friends, family and relatives. We are working exactly the same as before.” Furthermore, the formation of an NGO or cooperative had not yet taken place.

The distribution of land, highlighted as a benefit by some stakeholders had in reality not taken place. According to project staff groups were now working on separate plots of land. However, during the researcher’s time spent at Altan all groups were observed working en masse on the same plot of land, which resulted in arguments breaking out over which group had rights to what pile of soil. This observation was confirmed during interviews with local people, who reported that, although land had been officially distributed to groups, in reality these boundaries were not adhered to; LPM 6 explained the resultant situation:

People are now mining where ever they want. When the land was distributed some land has lots of gold and some doesn’t. So because the land has been divided people fight and argue over the most profitable land. The groups whose land doesn’t produce a lot of gold will enter and invade the area where a lot of gold has been found. People argue ‘This is my place!’ ‘No this is my place!’

According to the Local Facilitator this problem occurred due to a lack of external leadership, as the LF explained, “…as soon as the project staff and [previous] local leader went elsewhere the divided areas were lost”. Furthermore, the LF reported that the situation had
remained unchanged because, “The project never gave me a passport to say that I was the leader. So I don’t have the authority and right to organise the people.”

4.5.3.1.4 Non-Local Benefits

Table 12: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Non-Local Benefits of Project C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff (n = 5)</th>
<th>Sum Government Workers (n =2)</th>
<th>Local People (n = 10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Government (3)</td>
<td>Government – organisation and control (2)</td>
<td>Project Staff Salaries (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment (3)</td>
<td></td>
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Stakeholders understood that some of the benefits of Project C went beyond the local community. Firstly, staff identified that the government and environment also benefitted from the project. The national government was said to benefit through the establishment of the ASM division which meant “politicians benefit from getting more knowledge, information, and data about artisanal mining” (NPD). Furthermore, staff also pointed out that the local government would benefit from increased work opportunities for the unemployed. Secondly, staff reported that the environment would benefit as Ninjas adopted the land recovery techniques for mining sites. In addition, local government workers suggested that the local government would benefit from the organisation and control brought to a ‘messy’ sector of society. Meanwhile, local people understood that project staff, at the local and regional level benefitted greatly through receiving salaries from the project.

4.5.3.2 Stakeholder Priorities of Local Benefits in Project C

Project Management Staff

The Project’s management staff prioritised the empowerment of miners as the main benefit of Project C. These staff members understood that empowerment occurred when miners had the capacity and opportunity to engage in decisions which affected their livelihood. Thus, benefits which increased miners’ capacity to make decisions and gave miners further opportunities to influence decisions were seen as the sub-benefits of Project C (see Figure: 8). Firstly, miners’ capacity to make decisions was increased as their mental attitude changed from indifference and lawlessness to a desire to make decisions and solve issues within the government’s framework. In addition, knowledge of circumstances, problems, and pathways to solve issues further increased the miners’ capacity. Secondly, miners were given opportunities to engage in decision-making as the government became supportive of the mining sector through the
creation of an ASM division and a legal framework for ASM. Such support was termed, “empowerment from above” by the DOM. In addition, as miners joined together in work groups and an NGO, staff understood that this ‘collective action’ would provide further opportunities for miners to influence decisions.

**Figure 8: Project Management Staff’s Priorities of the Benefits of Project C**

Local staff and government workers together prioritised the organisation and control of the mining site as the main benefit of Project C. These stakeholders, who lived and worked closest to Altan, reported the mining site as disorderly and chaotic prior to the implementation of Project C. For these stakeholders, organisation and control was being achieved through government ordinances and the aggregation of miners; hence, these two benefits were also prioritised (see Figure: 9). The creation of government ordinances such as the interim government regulation meant that the sum government now had a legal framework by which it could regulate the mining sector. At Altan the most visible regulatory method had been the introduction of mining licences. In addition, it was understood that the aggregation of miners into work groups and an NGO would further organise and control the miners. For example, groups were only permitted to work on certain areas which would make it easier for the government to extract taxes and police the recovery of land mined at Altan.

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86 This includes the AS, the SVG, and the SPC.
Local Miners

Local miners clearly prioritised the material benefits that came from working on the gold fields, rather than any of the benefits they had received from Project C (See Figure 10). Mining and selling gold had become a significant income-generating livelihood strategy, as local miners described:

*Only at [Altan] do we have the chance to work and increase our income, so we have been working here a long time. (LPM 7)*

*I have two children so I come to Altan to increase my income to provide for them. (LPM 5)*

Hence, local miners were concerned about and prioritised increased income from the gold field which would further improve their livelihoods.

Secondly, local participants prioritised material benefits which would enable them to improve both the rate of gold recovery and the working conditions on the gold fields. As a result, local participants expected material benefits from Project C such as work clothes, tools, safety equipment, and new machinery. For example, the LF stated:

*When the project started the project staff said, ‘We will give safety clothes, and mining equipment, whatever you need we will provide for this year.’ Some people asked for a rain coat and rain boot...miners spade and mining equipment. The project staff*
always tell them, ‘We will decide about this for you,’ but after three years they haven’t decided and given us what we want.

As this quote shows, local participants also claimed that materials had been promised to them by project staff but not yet delivered.

Furthermore, all of the staff members interviewed understood that local miners prioritised material benefits:

What the [miners] don’t appreciate is the reports and the analysis and the assessments, they want to see something tangible. (DOM)

The common mentality amongst grass-roots people is that the project needs to give gifts. So [the miners] always expect materials and hardware from us. (PM)

Meanwhile, staff acknowledged that this difference in priorities had caused problems, as PM reported, “If you go there (to Altan) and don’t give any materials or things like that miners don’t actually like to participate in this kind of activity.”

**Figure 10: Local Miners’ Priorities of the Benefits of Project C**

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**Material Benefits:**
Improved livelihoods from increased income derived from gold fields

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**Material Benefits:**
Materials to improve gold recovery and work conditions
4.5.4 Which Factors Influenced Participation within Project C?

4.5.4.1 Reasons Local People Participated in Project C

During interviews with local staff, government workers, and local participants, it became clear that working in the mines and participating in the project had morphed into one entity. This was because the regulation of Altan would require all miners to be licensed and therefore anyone wishing to mine must participate in the project. Hence, for these stakeholders the reasons for participating in the project were the same as the reasons for becoming a miner, that is poverty and the material benefits afforded.

Table 13: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Reasons Local People Participated in Project C

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Staff (n = 4)</th>
<th>Local Staff and Government Workers (n =3\textsuperscript{88})</th>
<th>Local Participants (n=7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Materials Benefits (3)</td>
<td>Poverty (3)</td>
<td>Poverty (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship (2)</td>
<td>Material Benefits (3)</td>
<td>Promised Material Benefits (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisation and Control (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5.4.1.1 Management Staff

Material Benefits

The project’s management staff reported that local people participated in Project C because of the expectation the project would provide them with material goods. For example the MES stated:

\textit{There was a lot of expectations amongst artisanal miners…that the project will provide equipment for free, or give money to them…[and] make geological surveys for them so they can go where gold deposits are available.}

Furthermore, the PM suggested that, although miners hoped mining would allow them to return to livestock herding, \textit{“Artisanal miners are ex-herders…they think they will make some money from mining and buy livestock and then go out from mining, ”} this was unlikely, as \textit{“They have changed their lifestyle…and the experiences of other countries tell us that…they will stick with [mining] and starting from the second generation they will stick with this forever.”}

\textsuperscript{88} This includes the SVG and the SPC.
**Relationship**

Management staff suggested that a strong relationship between the project’s staff and miners was a reason why these miners participated in Project C. The importance of this relationship was explained by the MES:

> The project is all about relationship, we need to show [the miners] that we are genuinely interested in them and also that we respect them.... The process of building a relationship takes time, but we need to build trust and a relationship.... We have local offices and staff and our project staff have a very good relationship with miners.

This relationship was said to be built and maintained through occasional field visits by Ulaanbaatar-based staff; regular field visits by the Aimag Staff, and *sum* government counterpart; and the continued presence of the local facilitator who lived at *Altan*.

Furthermore, according to the *PM* such a strong relationship meant that, although “miners don’t want to participate, [they participate] because the staff are asking them, otherwise they really wouldn’t care.”

**4.5.4.1.2 Local Staff and Government Workers**

*Poverty*

Local staff and government workers understood that poverty was the reason why local people had adopted gold mining as a livelihood strategy and hence were participating in Project C. The *sum* in which *Altan* was situated had suffered a *zuud* in 2001 which had left many herders without enough livestock to continue herding as the main livelihood strategy, as the *SPC* stated, “After their animals died about 60 to 70 percent of people became unemployed and they went to the gold mines.” Hence, full-time miners were typically ex-herders to whom mining had become their primary income-generating strategy. Meanwhile, part-time miners were generally students, local wage earners, and herders, who mined during the summer months as an additional source of income. As basic commodity prices increased, it was reported that the number of part-time miners was on the upsurge.

*Material Benefits*

Local staff and *sum* government workers pointed to material benefits as a reason for miners’ participation in Project C. Firstly, participating in Project C meant miners could carry on working at *Altan*, considered a profitable mining area, and therefore continue in their current
livelihood strategy. Secondly, it was suggested that local miners had expected Project C to provide material goods such as tools, technology, and clothes; for example, the SPC reported:

*The reason people participate [in Project C] is to find a way for technology to increase their hard work, so at the very least they are not working with their hands...they want dust-free technology. This new technology will be found by the project.*

Thus, local people were participating to gain material goods which would make their work easier, safer, and more profitable.

*Organisation and Control*

Local staff and government workers also reported that miners participated in Project C, and remained mining at *Altan*, because the project had brought organisation and control. For example, in reply to the question ‘Why do the miners participate in project C?’ the AS stated:

*There is no organisation to protect the miners’ interest. Because this organisation (Project C) is for them to protect their interests they will certainly participate. This organisation will be able to represent their voice to the government and protect their interests. And also the miners think they need someone to control them.*

Hence, according to staff, participant miners saw value in organisation of the mining site (e.g. groups, NGO, etc), but also in an organisation (Project C) which would bring and administer control.

*4.5.4.1.3 Local Participants*

*Poverty*

The majority of local miners indicated that had been forced to engage in mining as a livelihood strategy because of poverty. This was exemplified in the following remarks:

*I am miner now, before I was a herder but all my animals died in the zuud. (LPM 4)*

*I want to increase our income. The mine is the only place where we have the chance to work and increase our income, so we have been working here a long time. (LPM 7)*

*In modern times of the free-market in Mongolia people don’t just work at one job, they have a few jobs.... I live with three other families, so I only have to herd animals*
every three days, so when it’s not my turn I come to the gold fields to increase my income and provide for my children. (LPM 3)

I work in the cultural centre as a watchman. I only work here in the mine on my weekends or summer holiday because my own salary is insufficient for our life costs. (LPM 5)

As the local government had begun to regulate the mining site through the issuing of licenses, miners now had to participate in Project C in order to mine at Altan. For instance, the LF reported:

Miners don’t have a choice. They want a place to live and work….The local government gave the miners information about the project and said, ‘It’s important to participate. If you are involved in the project the local government will give you permission to work in Altan’.

Thus, to ensure the continuation of this livelihood strategy, miners had joined and remained involved in Project C. Furthermore, a number of miners indicated that they planned to use their incomes to restock their herds and return to full-time livestock herding.

**Promised Material Benefits**

Participant miners reported that they had joined and continued to participate in Project C because of the material benefits promised to them by project staff. These material goods included tools, technology, safety gear, financial support for business ideas, clothes, health insurance, and ownership of land. Meanwhile, according to local miners, during visits project staff made broad promises, as P5 recalled, “The project staff just come and stay for a while and say, ‘What do you need? How is it going?’ and ‘Okay we will give you that’ and then they leave.” However, the majority of miners complained that these promises remained unfulfilled, as LPM 5 further explained:

I thought the project would be profitable for us….The project staff talked about mining tools, that they would be given or sold to the miners at a discount. So I thought if I participate in this project I will be sold mining tools at a discount or given tools, but it never happened….We talked about new technology with the project staff but we haven’t seen anything. We haven’t been given any of the safety clothes yet. If the
project gave us more things it would be very different, people would participate in activities and maybe the project would be implemented successfully.

Hence, the hope and promise of material benefits encouraged miners to participate, but the current lack of material benefits was now hindering their participation.

Furthermore, the LF, who was previously a part-time miner and herder, had been promised a salary on coming into his current role. However, this promise had not been delivered, as the LF reported, “After I was chosen as the leader I was told I would be given encouragement money\(^9^9\), but for two years I haven’t taken any money, it hasn’t been given.”

4.5.4.2 Barriers to Participation in Project C

There were both similarities and differences between the three stakeholders’ perceptions of barriers to participation (see Table: 14); hence they will be presented separately in Sections 4.5.4.2.1 to 4.5.4.2.4 While, many of the barriers identified could be placed in a number of categories, they have been categorised according to how the stakeholder presented the issue.

**Table 14: Stakeholder Perceptions of the Barriers to Participation in Project C**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Staff (n = 5(^9^0))</th>
<th>Government Workers (n = 2(^9^1))</th>
<th>Local People (n = 11(^9^2))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Miners’ Capacity (4)</td>
<td>Stagnant Legal Framework (2)</td>
<td>Material Benefits (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Material Benefits – expectancy (3), latency (3)</td>
<td>Other – information, regulation capacity, land distribution</td>
<td>Information Shortages (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Staff (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regulation (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Culture (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Relationship (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Meetings and Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Government (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Land Distribution (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Local Capacity (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Non-Participants (n = 4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Social Connections (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^9^9\) Translated as ‘урамшуулалтын мөнгө’. This term was used to describe money which was given to an employee or worker at the organisations discretion. Thus, it was a way for organisations to reward their workers and ‘encourage’ them.

\(^9^0\) This includes the OM, NPD, PM, MES, AS.

\(^9^1\) This includes the SVG and the SPC.

\(^9^2\) This includes the LF, six LPMs, and four NPMs.
4.5.4.2.1 Project Staff

During staff interviews, both the PM and the AS were forthcoming in talking about the problems Project C experienced with participation. However, the NPD and MES were less willing to talk about barriers to participation, with both initially reporting, “…there are no real problems with local participation” (NPD).

Local Capacity

The majority of staff reported that local miners lacked the mental and organisational capacity to fully participate in Project C. This lack of capacity was understood to inhibit participants from participating in the project, rather than limiting their ability to mine at Altan. For example, the MES stated, “Most [miners] don’t know how to participate in Project C. To get them to participate we need to change their capacity.” The project’s goal was to “build capacity [of the miners] to participate in decision-making” (PM). Hence, this lack of capacity was seen as deficiency in mental skills, education, organisation, and initiative needed to organise work-groups and an NGO – entities which Project C saw as decision-making institutions.

Expectation of Material Benefits

Staff reported that miners expected that Project C, as a development project, would deliver material benefits to its participants. This expectation had proven a barrier to participating in a ‘bottom-up’ project which does not “provide equipment for free or give money” (MES). According to the PM this expectation had arisen out of peoples’ experiences with other development organisations:

*The first development projects in Mongolia...gave lots of donations and grants etc....Now some development agencies, like World Vision are giving out hardware, giving out goats, etc.... So the common mentality among grass-roots people is that a project needs to give gifts.... So [miners] always expect materials and hardware from us.*

However, staff clearly stated that Project C was to ‘assist’ grass-root initiatives, and to give ‘software’ such as training and knowledge rather than giving ‘material benefits’, ‘gifts’ or ‘hardware’; even though it was acknowledged that “If you go to Altan and don’t give any materials...[miners] don’t actually like to participate in this kind of activity” (PM).
Latency of Material Benefits

Staff suggested that the latency of material benefits hindered miners’ participation in Project C’s activities. Staff noted that, although the project had been operating for three years “tangible benefits hadn’t started to arrive yet for the miners” (AS). As a result, miners had become apathetic towards the project and its activities, as staff explained:

Miners don’t really care [about the bottom-up approach] ….They actually don’t want to participate….They don’t care whatever way we work, they just…want to make their money. So if we go down there and talk with them and organise training some of them don’t like it because they think we are wasting their time. (PM)

Miners complain to me that we (project staff) are always asking questions but not making decisions about their problems or giving them any tangible benefits. (AS)

Staff, however, understood that material benefits were not to bring about participation but would come as miners were empowered through their participation.

Project Staff

Staff suggested that some of Project C’s own staff had inhibited local participation in this project. Firstly, management staff reported that some staff had a top-down approach which meant “[They] think people in a high position know what is best for the people at the grass roots” (NPD). This top-down mentality was especially present in older staff, as the PM explained:

The older [staff] still have this socialist mentality which is the top-down approach. Very hierarchical, just teaching those who are at the grass-roots level what to do, telling them what to do, and centralising the decision-making process all the time. This is the dominating mentality for those over 45 years old….They don’t want to change the way they work…we organise training from them but they don’t use the [participatory] approach.

According to the PM, if such a top-down mentality remained in staff, they “were pushed out” of Project C. In addition, staff noted that top-down organisation structure existed in Project C, as the AS reported, “It takes a long time to make decisions about the miners’ problems. I have to check with my superiors and they can take a long time to get back to me.” However, staff
also noted that local miners contributed to this top-down mentality because they too expected Project C’s staff to provide direction and control.

Secondly, it was suggested by the new PM that in the past staff had not utilised true participatory techniques which meant that “it is hard for us to say that miners made these decisions and because of this the project went this way” (PM). The project’s needs assessment was conducted by short, field visits where “project staff just went down to Altan and asked a few miners what they need and made promises that we will give this,” rather than by a “systematic survey of the miners …or a questionnaire” (PM). Furthermore, these meetings had occurred during the peak work season, which prohibited widespread participation. As a result of this approach, according to the PM, the “project washed [the miners’] brains,” so that miners had taken on staff priorities rather than vice-versa.

Meanwhile, a further outcome was that the project-introduced gold extraction technology was not being utilised by miners because “The miners already had their own machines but [the project] didn’t consider that that machine is more suitable for the grass-roots level” (PM).

Thirdly, staffs’ poor working relationship with the miners, an outcome of limited field time, was seen as a barrier to local participation. Both the PM and AS suggested that current field practices were insufficient to establish relationships:

> What we do at the moment is we just go on a field trip for one day and talk to the Ninja’s for two hours…and sometimes we organise a conference and invite them to this. That’s the only relationship we have and this way of work has been criticised. (PM)

> Generally every month I stay four to five days in the miners camp…but it’s too short a time to know the miners life and problems and how to implement the project. (AS)

The PM also suggested that a longer field stay of a month was needed for staff to build relationships with miners and “…feel what is artisanal mining…who are the miners” (PM).

**History and Culture**

Mongolia’s history and culture were also identified as a barrier to local participation in Project C. Firstly, a number of staff mentioned that Mongolian society is hierarchical which affected participatory exchanges, as the DOM described:
Groups in society don’t mix. The artisanal miners are kind of outcasts. Just recently [the project] brought them to the government house to meet with the parliamentarians it was quite tense. The miners got angry because they thought that the politicians talked so nicely and the politicians thought the miners were just blabbering.

As the DOM highlighted, the high power distance between the miners and policy makers inhibited an open exchange of ideas and opinions needed for local participation to effect change. Meanwhile, staff mentioned that miners were shy and often ashamed and hence were “afraid to come and talk with [project staff]” (PM). Furthermore, the DOM reported that a history of poor development projects meant “…some people are fed-up… and tell you right away, ‘We don’t need you, it won’t help us, we’ve had enough of projects.’”

Selection Criteria
The selection criteria of Project C were understood by staff to have prevented certain miners from participating in the project. Staff pointed out that only permanent, full-time miners registered to the local sum were selected for the project and only these miners would be granted licences under the current regulations. However, the geography at Altan allowed unregistered miners to mine, as the PM noted, “The landscape there is very open, so people can come from all [directions] so it’s hard to control the area.”

Local Government
Staff understood the local government to have hindered local participation within Project C. Firstly, staff suggested that the local government had been hesitant to acknowledge ASM as an issue that needed addressing, and was hence slow in regulating the industry and providing social welfare benefits. Meanwhile, institutional weakness within the local government meant that even though the regulation of Altan had begun, the local government could not enforce these temporary laws. For example, the local government did not have the resources to ensure miners obeyed environmental protection standards, or prevent unregistered miners from working at Altan.

4.5.4.2.2 Government Workers
Stagnant Legal Framework
The local government workers reported that the absence of a concrete legal framework had proved a barrier to local participation in Project C, as the SVP stated, “This project is stagnant because there is no mining law yet.” Although an interim regulation was in place, it did not
make clear provision for the local government to tax the miners, and hence the government was yet to provide health and safety services to the miners. This meant there was little incentive for participants to form an NGO. In addition, because of ambiguous land laws\(^9\) the SVP reported, \textit{“We don’t really know who the land belongs to...herders...miners...or mining companies.”}\(^9\)

\textit{Other}

The local government workers also confirmed a number of barriers to participation that local people and project staff highlighted. Firstly, information shortages were highlighted, as the SVP reported, \textit{“Miners aren’t participating because they don’t know about the project’s aims and activities...they really don’t have any information about the project.”}\(^2\) Secondly, the government workers reported that as mining company contracts are negotiated by the central government they lacked the authority to annul the current contract and give \textit{Altan} to a miners’ NGO. In addition, government workers understood that the regulation of \textit{Altan} would prevent non-local and part-time miners from working there. Furthermore, government workers suggested that an NGO would be difficult to form due to a lack in the miners’ mental capacity, and the limited natural gold reserves at \textit{Altan}.

\subsection*{4.5.4.2.3 Local People}

\textit{Material Benefits}

Participant miners reported that Project C’s failure to provide material benefits which led to improved livelihoods was detrimental to their participation. Miners had joined the project on the expectations, as promised by project staff, that they would be given material benefits, such as new technology, tools, and clothes. However, participant miners were not satisfied with the material goods that had been delivered as these were seen as either existing prior to the project, or being ineffective in improving the work conditions and profitability of \textit{Altan} (see Section: 4.5.3.2.3).

Miners suggested that Project C’s approach to material benefits had changed. Initially, project staff had promised material benefits and indicated that the project would support the miners’ requests and ideas. However, over time, promises had been unfulfilled and requests unanswered, as the following statements highlight:

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\(^9\) See Mearns (2004a, 2004b) for a further description of the problems associated with Mongolia’s land laws.
First we were told that we would all be given technical instruments and tools and the project staff asked requests from us, ‘What do you want?’ … But if we ask the project to do something they never do it. They say ‘Do this and that’ … There are no real changes here before I was working like this and I am still working the same. (LPM 6)

We told the project staff that we would like to build a shower house, within the groups there are some builders…. At the time the project staff said ‘That would be fine.’ After some time I asked by phone again and they said ‘We don’t know.’ Now the project said the savings will have to come from within our NGO. (LF)

However, participants were unable to drop out of a Project C as continued participation guaranteed access to their livelihoods.

Non-participant miners had also chosen to remain separate from the project because they could not see any reasons for joining. Such reasons were related to the project’s visible results and material benefits; for example NPM 4 stated, “I don’t know any of the benefits/profits of the project... [and] I can’t see any of the results of the project so I don’t want to participate.”

**Information Shortages**

Through interviews and casual conversations, information shortages were identified as an obstacle to miners' participation in Project C. Firstly, participant miners suggested that the project did not provide enough information about its activities and this inhibited participation. For example LPM 1 reported, “The project doesn’t give us any information about what they are doing,” and the LF stated, “The people [here] don’t understand the project and don’t know about group work so they don’t participate.” This lack of information about the project was apparent in conversations with miners, as LPM 4’s interview script highlights:

*I am a group leader…. I don’t know anything about the project but I want the project to be implemented, it will improve our lives…. I don’t know what activities are being implemented…. I have attended one meeting with [the AS]. I don’t know what impacts the project have had…. I don’t know anything about the project so I don’t know if there are any problems.*

Meanwhile, during the time spent at Altan, a number of miners asked the research team for more detail about Project C, for example, the budget, when and what technology would come, what activities would be implemented, etc. Moreover, interviewees gave contrasting details
about the project’s activities, especially regarding the distribution of licences and land, further
highlighting the presence of information shortages.

Non-participants also reported that information shortages prevented them from participating in Project C; for instance NPM 3 reported, “I came here last year, but I’ve just heard a little bit about the project. I want to participate but I don’t know how to become involved.” Meanwhile, the clarity and delivery of information proved a further barrier, as NPM 1 stated, “I went to the meetings, but I didn’t understand what they were talking about.”

**Regulation**

According to local miners the regulation of Altan was proving a barrier to participation in Project C, and hence an obstacle to mining at Altan. Initially, miners not registered in the local sum had been unable to participate in the project; for instance NPM 1 reported, “During the meeting I couldn’t write my name down to participate in the project because I don’t officially live here.” Meanwhile, the current regulation of Altan meant only those registered to the local sum would be granted a licence to mine at Altan. In addition, according to local miners, these regulations meant part-time miners and those not working in registered groups would not be granted a licence, and were therefore prohibited from Altan. However, as this regulation was not yet complete at the time of interviews, ‘prohibited miners’ were still, some discretely and others not, observed working at Altan.

**Relationship with Project Staff**

The poor relationship between project staff and local miners also emerged as an obstacle to participation. Miners disapproved of both the conduct and length of time that project staff spent at Altan:

>Staff meet with a few miners then leave…. The project staff just come for a short while and say, ‘What do you need?’, ‘How’s it going?’, and ‘Okay we will give you that,’ and then they leave. (LPM 5)

[One staff member] recently came here and only stayed for ten minutes. I asked them ‘Do I need to gather participants?’ and they said ‘There’s no point.’ I really want all the staff members to come to Altan and stay a long time, to meet with each person, not just to make a report but look at the real situation….The main reason they (project staff) come is that they want to tell us what to do, ‘Do this and do it that way’. So all
the directors should come and stay a long time and talk deeply with participants. Because they haven’t done this the participants don’t understand anything. Miners don’t tell the project staff their problems because they never stay. They have never even stayed a night here. (LF)

As these quotations show, staff had never established a trusting relationship with miners because they had not stayed for a long period of time at Altan. This meant neither staff nor local miners shared openly with each other. Therefore, the information flow was disrupted, with staff making decisions based on limited information, and miners not understanding the project. Hence, staff were seen by miners as poor “bosses” who made promises and gave orders but did not want to spend the time getting to know miners and their situations.

The failure to deliver on promises and lack of visible change at Altan had further disrupted the formation of a relationship between staff and miners, as LPM 6 stated, “I hoped the project would improve my life, but it hasn’t changed as they (staff) said.” Furthermore, this relationship was hindered by the power differential between the project’s staff members (members of upper society) and miners (lowest members of society); for example, one miner commented, “People don’t want to participate with staff because they are ashamed of their work” (NPM 2).

Meetings and Workshops
A number of miners reported that they had been unable to participate fully in project meetings and workshops. Firstly, some miners did not attend the larger meetings located at the sum centre because of distance and lack of transport. Meanwhile, not everyone’s voice was heard at these open meetings. For example, LPM 6 reported, “At the meetings everyone is quarrelling, so there is no opportunity to say anything,” and LPM 3 stated, “I attended the meeting but didn’t say anything. I was just listening; I am shy so I didn’t speak in front of the others.”

Secondly, miners reported that they were often unable to attend the meetings and workshops that project staff held at Altan. According to miners, these meetings and workshops were held during peak working hours; hence, miners were often too busy to attend. In addition, the

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94 The mining site Altan was approximately 14 kilometres from the sum.
95 The expression used here was ‘нүүр хагарсан’, with ‘нүүр хагарсангүй’ used to describe someone who isn’t shy (Global Dictionary, n.d.).
project staff’s limited field time inhibited wider participation in meetings and seminars, as the LF explained:

The problem with meetings is that project staff come for only a short period of time, so we can’t get organised. We don’t have enough time, it’s difficult to gather everyone. So we only gather five or so people and this is called a project meeting.

Furthermore, when meeting with staff, miners did not freely express their opinions, as the LF explained:

Some staff come to Altan and ask the project participants questions, but nobody talks to them. They can’t tell them their problems…[because] miners are low educated and a little slow…some people are shy, they are countryside people and they can’t communicate well with others.

Hence, socio-cultural factors of shyness, education, and power distance combined to prevent miners from voicing their opinion at these chance meetings.

Land Distribution

The distribution of land to work groups was seen as defunct by miners, and therefore participant-miners’ involvement in Project C was inhibited. Land had been divided into plots and distributed to work groups; however, the amount of gold reserves in each plot was undetermined. Therefore, there was no incentive for groups to mine in their own plots. The distribution of land was described as a “quarrel apple;”\(^\text{96}\) for reasons which LPM 6 explained:

The main problem in Altan is the land….When there is a lot of gold at one place miners all crowd together at that ravine….they don’t care about the land boundaries and all end up working in the one place. The land has been distributed but the rules and distribution have disappeared and nobody pays any attention to it anymore. Groups argue as project groups don’t want other people working on their land.

Miners reported such arguments were commonplace with the “strong” dominating, as LPM 2 reported, “Groups always argue about the soil, it happens every day and usually the strong wins.” As such, the rewards from participating in the project, and therefore, the income from mining, went to the strongest groups.

\(^{96}\) Mongolian idiom, ‘маргааны алим’.
A lack of outside control had been a catalyst for miner groups to disregard the land distribution. According to miners, groups disobeyed land distribution rules once project staff and the original LF had ceased being present at Altan. Meanwhile, the current LF conceded he could not keep groups on their own plots, as the LF explained, “The project have never given me a passport saying I am the leader, so I don’t have the right or authority to lead and organise people.” In addition, non-participants would arrive in Altan to mine and argue with participants stating, “This is not project land, it is Mongolian land, and it belongs to Mongolia, so we have the right to work here, it is our Mongolian right” (LPM 6). Furthermore, the LF felt he did not have the authority to prevent this and only allow licensed miners to work at Altan, as he explained, “I can’t stop people’s wishes and activities through one small licence.” Rather, the LF understood that the project itself needed to bring control to the situation; “If the project just brings books but doesn’t have control there will be no results” (LF).

**Capacity**

The capacity of the both Altan and the miners was seen as a barrier to participation in Project C. Firstly, miners understood that Altan itself may not have the gold capacity on which to establish an NGO97, as LPM 5 stated, “People can’t work in this soil for the rest of their lives.” Furthermore, the LF understood that a lack of mental capacity inhibited miners’ involvement:

> People won’t participate because their mind is under-developed. Their character has been broken from working in the mines for a long time. One time when we had a meeting nothing entered their minds. They don’t understand anything…their heads are empty…they are dim-witted98.

The LF asserted that without outside intervention these ‘dim-witted’ miners would be unable to organise themselves and establish an NGO.

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97 This point was also made by the SVG.
98 The LF often used this term ‘оюун ухаан муутай,’ which translates literally as bad intelligence, to describe the local miners.
4.5.4.2.4 Non-Participant Miners

Social Connections

During the interviews with the non-participant miners it was reported that a lack of social connections obstructed them mining at Altan and participation in Project C. The work groups at Altan were made up of tandag humuus, that is friends and relatives. As a result those with weak social connections could not join an existing group, as NPM 2 reported, “I moved to [the sum nearest Altan] one year ago...we have no friends or relatives here....I have been to the gold fields to find money but I didn’t know anyone there so I couldn’t join a group.” Furthermore, during the time spent at Altan it was observed that a number of people sat in groups of two or three next to the mining site. During casual conversations with these small groups it was revealed that weak social connections had limited their group size. This in turn meant for these small work groups mining was more arduous and less profitable than for large work groups of seven to ten members.
Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction
This chapter addresses the study’s aim of exploring how the stakeholders in Mongolian rural development projects interpret the concept of ‘participation’. This chapter is divided into three separate sections which correspond to the research’s three key questions:

- How do stakeholders in Mongolian rural development projects understand the concept of ‘participation’?
- What do stakeholders in Mongolian rural development projects perceive as the benefits of participation?
- Which factors influence participation within Mongolian rural development projects?

In each section the results from the three case studies will be correlated, compared, and examined in relation to ‘participatory’ development theories and explored in the light of Mongolia’s unique context, i.e. history, culture, social/economic/political environment, etc. This chapter seeks to provide the reader with an ethnographic snap-shot of development projects in Mongolia, showing how interpretations of participation are shaped by the development organisations’ discourse and procedures, field level practicalities, and Mongolia’s unique context. Lastly, this chapter will highlight the constraints of this study and make suggestions for future research.

5.2 Understandings of ‘Participation’

This study investigated three different rural development projects in Mongolia, yet a dominant understanding or interpretation of local ‘participation’ existed across the stakeholders:

*Participation is contributions of group labour and information for material benefits, within a top-down authoritarian structure (including local institutions).*

Local peoples’ participation was not understood as directing or leading the project, but rather as being directed and controlled by the ‘project’ – i.e. the Development Organisation (DO) itself. Such an interpretation of participation does not fall neatly within a ‘typology of participation’ as outlined by Pretty (1995) and others, but contains trace elements of

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99 Stakeholders consisted of local participants, and sum, aimag, and Ulaanbaatar staff.

This dominant interpretation of ‘participation’ arose from two sources (see Figure: 11). Firstly, it reflected the DO’s objectives and procedures of delivering a targeted, efficient, effective, and sustainable development project, which is best accomplished through local contributions, top-down management and control. Secondly, for local people, participation in the project became a livelihood strategy, taking on a similar function to ‘employment’ (Taylor, 2004). In this regard local participants engaged with the project as they would any normative livelihood strategy or ‘employment’, with an expectation that their work would be directed and controlled by authoritative structures (Taylor, 2004). According to the literature reviewed and Cultural Informants (CIs) interviewed, this expectation of top-down control is grounded in Mongolian history and culture, and is a prevailing feature in contemporary Mongolian society. Meanwhile, the Mongolian terms used for participation in the projects, ‘охрулцох’ (ohrulzokh) and ‘хамрах’ (hamrakh) did not bear the connotation of decision-making, but rather, as a part of Mongolian culture carried the meaning of the dominant interpretation of participation outlined above.

**Figure 11: The Dominant Interpretation of ‘Participation’ and its Sources**

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**Source:** DO staff - A targeted, effective, efficient, sustainable project

**Participation is:**
- Group work
- Contributions of information and labour
- A tool for material benefits
- Within a top-down authoritarian structure
- Institutional involvement

**Source:** Local participants - A normative livelihood strategy

*Note: Only DO staff directly associated institutional involvement with participation.*
These findings confirm the large body of research which suggests that top-down control prevails within ‘participatory’ projects (Craig and Porter, 1997; Mosse, 2001, 2004) and local interpretations of ‘participation’ arise from culture and past experiences (Michener, 1998; Marsland, 2006). However, in contrast to other research (Nelson & Wright, 1995), this study showed a relatively uniform interpretation of participation across the majority of stakeholders. This uniformity came about as DO staff chose to abandon higher participatory ideals for practical reasons, and for local participants ideals of decision-making, control, and leadership were unfamiliar and undesired.

In the following section this dominant interpretation of participation will be examined according to its key themes (see Figure: 11): group work, contributions of information and labour, a tool for material benefits, top-down authoritarian structure, and institutional involvement. While a dominant interpretation emerged, some staff in Project C interpreted participation as local decision-making for empowerment purposes. Hence, at the end of this section this theme of participation as empowerment in Project C will also be explored and compared to the less verbalised theoretical notions of empowerment in Projects A and B.

5.2.1 Participation as Group Work

This study found that the majority of local people firstly associated and defined their participation in terms of ‘group work’. This was a result of not only the DOs’ selection of groups as the basic unit of participation, but also the prominence of groups and ‘group-think’ within Mongolian history, society, and culture. As Campi notes, “Nomadism puts the group ahead of the individual: Social cooperation whether voluntary or legally enforced is the keystone of both nomadic and socialist-communist societies” (1996, p. 93). In the case studies, Projects A and B selected groups as the basic unit of participation because groups afforded greater efficiency to the project activities, and resulted in increased material benefits for local people. These groups, therefore, fall into Oakley’s definition of ‘groups as receiving mechanisms’, meaning their essential function was to receive inputs and technologies which the project wished to diffuse (1991, p. 186) In contrast, Project C management staff associated groups with social action, i.e. a stronger voice in society. Such a definition is consistent with Oakley’s categorisation of ‘groups as social action’, whereby groups create social and economic linkages between people and help develop the cohesion and solidarity which are the basis for the groups to take action (1991, p. 185). However, outside this category were Project C’s local staff who reported that groups were used so the local government could ‘control’ the miners and the mining site. Meanwhile, for rural Mongolians,
groups are a socially embedded feature and conceptualised as ‘work groups’ consisting of friends and family. For example, prior to Project C’s interventions at Altan, miners had organised themselves into work groups consisting of friends and family, and in Project B, after the project exited, groups changed from solely family-based to both friends- and family-based work groups.

The majority of interviewees in this study associated group function with increased material benefits rather than a vehicle for social influence or political action. Local participants associated groups with pooled labour for the purpose of productivity gains, whilst for project staff groups also achieved economies of scale through the provision of larger capital investments, such as tractors. The emphasis on the group’s role of increasing productivity was highlighted by stakeholders commonly referring to groups as ‘brigades’, or ‘labour’ groups. This understanding is comparable to the role of Mongolia’s socially embedded groups, such as those that operated under collectivism (negdel, heseg, brigade, and suur), and the khot ail, which functioned, and continues to function, to pool labour and resources for increased productivity of tasks (Sneath, 1999). Meanwhile, local participants did not envision the group’s function as a mechanism for democratic decision-making, either within the project or the wider community as this was not an integral part of groups in Mongolia’s past or present situation. For example, even Project C’s local participants failed to associate groups with solidarity and collective action despite the project specifically encouraging them in this direction.

The majority of groups within all three projects consisted of friends and family members. It was reported that such a composition contributed to a group’s stability; for example, Project A staff stated that groups formed on weak social connections broke up more readily. Results from this study support Upton’s (2008a) research which reported interpersonal mistrust as a major barrier to group formation in Mongolia. Hence, in a culture where trust is built upon relationships, groups made up of friends and relatives helped negate this barrier. Friends and family also form the basis of khot ail groupings (Sneath, 1999; Bold, 2001), and as such, this composition was the most natural way for groups to be arranged.

Within this study the household, rather than the individual, emerged as the unit of group membership in response to a need for flexibility. A typical group consisted of two to eight households (united by friendship or kin bonds) and therefore it would ultimately have a rotating, flexible membership of up to the sum of all the households (see Figure: 12).
Households could send different household members to participate in group activities, dependent on their availability and the nature of the activity. Such flexibility enhanced a group’s survival because if one member of a household was unable to attend group activities, another member could take their place. Moreover, the rotation of household members meant the most suitable person for specific group activities could be used, which would in turn increase the group’s efficiency. This rotating and flexible household-based group fitted well within Mongolia as it reflected Mongolia’s group, rather than individual, orientation, and allowed for family splitting, an important strategy employed by Mongolian rural people, to continue (Sneath, 1999; Stewart 2000; Mearns 2004a).

**Figure 12: An Example of a Group within the Three Case Studies**

![Diagram](image)

Note: The group is composed of four households who all contribute different household members to group activities, designated by . These households are connected by kith and kin bonds designated by . A comparison of Figure: 12 and Figure: 3 shows that groups within the projects bore remarkable resemblance to a Mongolian’s *tandag humuus* networks.

Project groups in this study typically consisted of a revolving pool of between three and twenty-five people. It was suggested by interviewees that groups of this size were optimal as larger groups tended to dissolve more easily because of coordination difficulties and mistrust, which confirms similar findings by Upton (2008a). Moreover, groups of this size are a feature of Mongolian culture and history; for example, the *khot ail* has typically consisted of two to eight households (Sneath, 1999; Bold, 2001); the *suur* was made up of between one and four households (Upton, 2008a); and CIs reported that *tandag humuus* networks contain less than thirty members.
Results from this study suggest that an external facilitator or ‘catalyst’ is required to form longer-term, stable groups, which supports Upton’s conclusion that “…third party intervention…[is] integral to the emergence of organised collective action and trust” (2008a, p. 186). Within Projects A and B, the DOs acted, through their staff, as the catalyst to group formation by providing an incentive (i.e. material benefits from the project), organisation, and workshops. The workshops served a tripartite catalytic function: firstly, they provided participants with the knowledge on how to form groups, and also the knowledge through which group work would be profitable (i.e. vegetable knowledge); secondly, they enabled participants to form and strengthen relationships with one another and progress along a continuum from stranger to acquaintance to friend to tandag humuus; and thirdly, workshops allowed for participants to better know each other, including characteristics such as social connections, personality, and interests, which in turn helped participants to group together in the most ‘profitable’ or ‘appropriate’ groups.

The effect of an external facilitator on project groups was highlighted by contrasts across the three case studies. Firstly, out of the three case studies, only the miners in Project C had formed groups prior to the project’s interventions. These miner groups resembled the most prominent group in rural society, the khot ail; as they were formed predominantly along pre-existing kith and kin relationship bonds to pool labour for increased gold productivity. Additionally, without a strong, present external facilitator, and no material incentives for stable membership, these groups further resembled the khot ail in that they were changeable, dissolving and reforming often. In contrast, groups within Project A and B, formed through the external facilitation of the DO with material incentives, were stable and clearly defined. These groups were not based solely on pre-existing kith and kin bonds; instead, many groups had formed on tandag humuus relationships which evolved during the project. Thus, these groups were reminiscent of work-groups under the Collective era, like the suur, which were stable, long-term, and formed by unrelated households for material incentives (a wage), under external facilitation, within a rigid organisational structure (Upton, 2008a).

The results also indicate that continued external monitoring is needed for groups to function equitably and within project rules. For example, staff in Project A and B reported that they needed to monitor groups to ensure that resources (tractors, seeds, etc.) were being shared equitably and free-riding was kept to a minimum. Meanwhile, in Project C, miners had ceased to abide by land distribution rules once the project failed to provide a powerful external monitor. External monitoring of groups is needed in Mongolia for a number of reasons.
Firstly, interviewees suggested that corruption is commonplace, and as a hierarchical society, it is typical for leaders and the more powerful within groups to monopolise the group’s resources and issue orders, as happens in the patron-client relationships which exist in some khot ails (Odgaard, 1996; Mearns, 2004a). Secondly, only oral contracts between group members, a feature of khot ail groups (Sneath, 1999), existed in all three case studies. Thus, in a context of weak rural law enforcement an external rule enforcer (the DO staff) was required. Expanding Upton’s (2008a) finding that, DO staff acted as group “trust-brokers” by facilitating linkages between group members, the results of this study indicate that staff act as group “trust-brokers” by also providing external monitoring and rule enforcement.

In line with Mongolian culture, project groups within the three case studies had a top-down defined leadership structures. For instance Humphrey and Sneath write, “Our research suggests the leadership of groups is an important structuring principle in Inner Asian society and is regarded… as the ‘natural’ way to organise affairs” (1999, p. 296). Within this study, group leadership fell upon, or perhaps was seized by, the most important or powerful group member. Leaders were the wealthiest, eldest, most connected, or well-known members of the group, as anything different would have gone against Mongolian culture. CIs confirmed Sneath’s observations that a powerful leader is important in a hierarchical, group-orientated society where connections and relationship are important in everyday life (1999). As a result, in this study group leaders were the most powerful members, who could use their power to help ensure the group’s success and prevent free-rider problems.

5.2.2 Participation as Contributions of (Group) Information and Labour

In the case study projects, participation was interpreted as local participants’ contributions of information and labour to the project. For staff, these participant contributions ensured a more efficient and sustainable project. Meanwhile, for local people these contributions were seen as their employment duties which were necessary to ensure material benefits.

During the planning stages of Projects A and C, local people contributed information to the project. This process was one of information extraction, served to better inform project staff, rather than for the purpose of empowering local people through decision-making. Information was collected through ‘PRA’ style workshops and seminars, which utilised techniques such as focus group discussions, mapping, etc. Chambers (1995, 2005) believes PRA-type exercises should be used to facilitate discussions amongst participants which would entail local people doing their own appraisal and analysis of problems and solutions, enabling them to lead and
control the project. Meanwhile, in previous case studies of development projects in Mongolia, PRA techniques were reported as providing a catalyst for herder collective action (Ykhanbai and Bulgan, 2006; Schmidt, 2006a; Upton, 2008a). However, in this study, PRA techniques were not used for the set purpose of facilitating collective action, a community-led project, or empowerment. Instead, in line with the writings of Craig and Porter (1997) and Mosse (2004), these techniques were applied at the discretion and control of project staff in order to gather information which was then primarily used by the DOs rather than local people.

The main activities of all three projects revolved around participants’ contributions of physical labour; hence, staff and local people alike interpreted participation in this manner. Physical labour was completed in work groups (see Section: 5.2.1) and took on a semblance of ‘employment’, i.e. local peoples’ services in order to receive the project (Taylor, 2004). In the rural regions of Mongolia, poverty levels are high, and livelihood options or employment opportunities outside of livestock herding are few (UNDP, 2007). In response, the projects’ objectives were to create or sustain rural livelihood strategies, which meant that for local people participation in a development project had morphed into ‘employment’. Past and present livelihood strategies or employment have often centred on the contribution of labour under the discretion of higher structures of authority, for example, the banner system of the Manchu period, state collectives and industry during Communism, and patron-client relationships within khot ails. As a result, for local people, employment in the project where the primary tasks involved top-down controlled labour, rather than decision-making, was a familiar and welcome concept. The language used within interviews reflected the strong linkage between participation and labour as interviewees commonly describing their roles in the project in terms like ‘work’ (ajul), ‘working together’ (hamtdaa ajulaar), ‘labour’ (khordorlmor), and ‘work groups’ (brigades).

Staff and local participants understood contributions of physical labour or work to be the defining part of what was termed ‘active participation’ or ‘idekhtie ohrulzokh’. In a similar vein to literature (Bruun & Odgaard, 1996; Rossabi, 2005), project staff reported that rural development initiatives since the 1990s had primarily involved aid and relief projects, where handouts of material goods were given to rural people in need. Hence, interviewees used the term ‘idekhtie ohrulzokh’ to distinguish the case studies’ ‘development’ projects, where local people had to contribute work to receive material goods, from past ‘relief’ projects.

Furthermore, during Communism, employment within state enterprises like the negdel had provided few incentives for workers to increase productivity and efficiency, as wages were in
effect fixed (Goldstein & Beall, 1994; Sneath, 1999). Hence, _idekhtie ohrulzokh_ also carried
the connotation of ‘hard work’, where increased effort resulted in increased material benefits,
rather than simply the ‘work’ of the _negdel_ which had brought a fixed wage. For Mongolians,
a concept of work for individual profit is a departure from history where work has been done
for the good of others, such as the ‘party’ (termed ‘nam’ or _nam_) during Communism, and
also a departure from a culture based on group priorities, hospitality, and generosity
(Goldstein & Bealle, 1994). However, as work in the project was done in the realm of a
group, it was still conceptualised by local people as existing outside the individual sphere. For
example, participants often commented that they were working hard for ‘the project’ or ‘the
group’, and were shy to talk about their individual gains.

5.2.3 Participation as a Tool for Material Benefits

Stakeholder interpretations of participation in this study clearly fell within the category of
‘means’ or ‘tool’ as has been outlined in development literature (Oakley, 1991; Nelson &
Wright, 1995). Local participants having conceptualised the project as ‘employment’,
understood that their contributions of labour and information were a means for gaining
material resources and benefits. Meanwhile, for the DOs’ staff, stakeholder participation
(contributions of information and labour) was a tool which enabled them to design and
implement a project that resulted in more effective and sustainable material benefits.

The results of this study show that local participants clearly prioritised the material resources
and benefits that the project would deliver above all other benefits (see Section: 5.3.4). At the
outset local people expected development projects to, above all else, provide them with
material resources (such as flour, rice, livestock, spades, etc.). Examples of this expectation
and prioritisation were evident in all three case studies. In Project A, local people only joined
in the project once the previously hidden material resources were disclosed, while in Project
B, local people left the project once they had been given spades, potatoes, etc., and after
material benefits had been slow to materialise. Meanwhile, in Project C, the major cause of
disgruntlement amongst participant miners was the absence of promised and expected
material resources. According to interviewees in this study, recent ‘relief’ projects, and years
of state socialism had created dependency on outside assistance and an expectation that
foreign organisations brought material resources (described by the Mongolian term ‘_belen_

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100 The term ‘material resources’ stands for the inputs of the projects given to participants, i.e. seeds, tractors,
etc. In contrast, the term ‘material benefits’ stands for the outputs of the projects’ activities, i.e. vegetables,
meat, cash, etc.
setgeltay\textsuperscript{101}, or ‘dependent spirit’). Therefore, local participants’ interpretation of participation as a tool for material benefits was grounded in an understanding that development projects would and should, first of all, provide material resources.

For local participants, projects had moved beyond simply the provision of material resources to become a livelihood strategy or ‘employment’. This livelihood strategy had brought significant material benefits to participants through the project’s combined provision of material resources, knowledge, organisation, and control. Importantly, these material benefits went beyond typical household subsistence needs to include financial income. For example, the vegetables in Projects A and B were of the type, quality, and quantity that could be sold for cash. Financial income was highly valuable to local people given the current local context in which cash income is vital, but limited earning opportunities exist. For instance, in 2007, UNDP Mongolia identified rural unemployment as a root cause of rural poverty, and reported decreasing rates of employment opportunities in rural areas outside of herding. Moreover, basic living expenses such as school fees, health services, and non-household-produced food staples (rice, flour, oil, etc.) had risen rapidly in recent years.

DO staff also understood participation as a tool which would ultimately increase the material benefits for local participants. Stakeholder contributions of information enabled the DOs to design a project, and hence material benefits, which reflected the socio-cultural, economic, and political realities of the target population (Hayward et al, 2004). This information was typically collected using PRA tools, which, according to staff, enabled a wide-range of stakeholders to voice their opinions, thus increasing the accuracy and scope of the information collected. Additionally, local contributions of labour in groups meant that DOs could achieve economies of scale and efficiency gains for project activities. Furthermore, participation, for two main reasons, was also a tool to increase the sustainability of material benefits. Firstly, the participation of the local and national government helped provide long-term land lease tenures, and built social connections between the government officials and local participants which would facilitate the continuation of activities. Secondly, although their participation was often conceptualised by local people as simply ‘labour’, it was in reality learning through doing. During project activities the DOs provided knowledge, resources, and a less risky, controlled environment for participants to ‘labour’. As such, through the process of

\textsuperscript{101} This Mongolian term, ‘бэлэн сэтэлтэй’, directly translates as ‘ready’ or ‘prepared’ spirit.
laboring’ participants acquired skills, experience, and interpersonal trust which would become the capital needed for material benefits to continue in the future.

5.2.4 Participation within a Top-Down Authoritarian Structure

In this study local participation was understood to occur within the project’s top-down, authoritarian structure. This structure enabled the DOs to ‘control’ the project, meaning it was the DO who ultimately determined and directed the project’s aims, objectives, and activities (inputs and outputs). Craig and Porter (1997) argue that DOs control projects because, in order to be ‘accountable’ to funders, they must prioritise effective management, and further suggest that this results in only a small portion of the project’s resources reaching the intended beneficiaries. However, in contrast, this study found that because the DOs controlled projects they were in fact also ‘accountable’ to local participants, as local participants prioritised material benefits rather than control of the project. Top-down, authoritarian structures were required in the projects to successfully negotiate with government bureaucracies and organise project logistics in a centrally orientated country, where practical difficulties such as transport and communication hamper rural-based initiatives. In addition, top-down control helped mitigate power imbalances, nepotism, and free riding in the target population. Thus, a top-down authoritarian structure was desired by both DOs and local participants because it was a normative concept seen as the most effective way of delivering material benefits to rural people. For example, the local participants in all three case studies reported that the control and direction of the project should rest with the DO and its staff. Meanwhile, local participants in Projects A and B were highly satisfied with top-down control because it brought material benefits, whilst local participants in Project C were disillusioned with a bottom-up approach that had failed to bring material rewards. As top-down authoritarian structures the three projects contained a number of similar qualities, such as control of the decision-making process, the selection of ‘correct’ participants, a hierarchical staffing structure, and provision, which will be examined individually in the following sections.

Project-Controlled, Decision-Making Processes

In this study, the majority of staff and local participants understood that the DO would control the decision-making processes in the project. Autonomous, local, decision-making, independent of the DO, did not take place within the identification, analysis, and planning/design phases in any of the three projects. Rather, at best, staff consulted local
people and took into account their opinions and wishes as they themselves made the major decisions. Therefore, local participants did not make decisions which directly impacted on the project’s framework. Instead, the extent to which local opinions shaped the project framework was at the discretion of the DOs and their funding agencies’ mandates. Furthermore, during the implementation phase local decisions could only be made within the projects’ mostly rigid framework. Hence, notions of independent local decision-making were absent; for example, local participants in Project B could not recollect any decisions they had made apart from joining the project; in Project A local people organised groups and decided on a business plan which still had to be sanctioned from above; whilst in Project C, although staff claimed bottom-up decision-making, these decision had to be ratified by staff at higher-levels.

A number of DO staff, in a reflection of ‘people-centred’ development theory, suggested that in a ‘participatory’ project local people made decisions. However, in the case studies for a number of reasons, local decision-making was in reality about influencing the decision-making process and making choices within the project’s established framework. Firstly, as authors like Craig and Porter (1997) and Mosse (2001, 2004) have surmised, because Projects A and B were externally funded it was necessary for them to deliver fixed, quantifiable results in a measurable timeframe. With such upward accountability, effective, controlled management was needed and therefore, local decision-making which had the ability to change the project’s direction and activities was not a project objective. Meanwhile, Project C, with a recent reemphasis on a ‘grass roots’ approach, had to ensure that the decisions local people made were in line with ‘grass roots’ development theories, which meant ‘bottom-up’ decisions had to be ratified by ‘top-down’ management. Secondly, as literature points out and CIs confirmed, within Mongolian employment and livelihood strategies it is normal for decision-making to occur only within higher structures. In this regard, the projects were akin to a Communist negdel: information was passed up to a central management committee, which held control and decision-making power, and directives flowed down. Thirdly, disincentives for independent decision-making behaviour are also present in Mongolian culture. The harsh climatic variables and geography mean a diversion from traditional livestock practices can have disastrous results for herders (Baabar, 2004); hence rural people are often described as ‘risk averse’ (Campi, 1996). The herders dependence on nature appears to have given rise to an external locus of control orientation (Dodd, 1998) - where powers outside herders’ control, such as weather, govern the course of their lives (Goldstein & Bealle, 1994; Humphrey, 1996). Meanwhile, during Communist times disobedience or non-conformity to higher powers was often punished severely (Baabar, 1999).
The Selection of ‘Appropriate’ Participants

As an authoritarian structure, the projects also controlled the selection of local participants to ensure successful activities and sustainable results. In all three case studies only local people who fitted within the projects’ framework (aims, objectives and activities) were selected. This contrasts to empowerment-orientated development where typically the project’s framework arises after the selection of the local community. As a result, in these case studies the selection criteria reflected each project’s aims, objectives, and activities; for example, group work was a key activity of all three projects, so only local people who were willing, and capable of group work (Project A and B), or currently working in a group (Project C) were selected. Likewise, because Project’s A & B objectives were sustainable (and therefore profitable) cooperatives and groups, those who were ‘poor - but capable’ were selected and the poorest of the poor or nen yadoo excluded (see Section: 5.4.2).

To ensure that only ‘appropriate’ participants were chosen the projects employed controlled, rigorous selection processes. Similar to Cleaver’s findings (1999), staff in the study understood that local people could provide false information and use tandag humuus connections to ensure their selection in the project. To mitigate this, the DOs employed a multi-stage, multi-stakeholder selection process, ensuring triangulation of data by utilising government statistics, local government officials, peer group meetings, participant interviews, and local staff. Furthermore, Project A initially even tried to hide the fact that it would give participants material goods in order to ensure those local people with the ‘appropriate’ motivations (long-term benefits rather than a material handout) were selected.

Hierarchical Staffing Structure

A hierarchical staffing structure, necessary for centralised decision-making and control, was present in all three case studies. A tiered, top-heavy project management structure was present and reflected Mongolia’s administrative system, as staff were based at the sum, aimag, and Ulaanbaatar levels. Information passed up this chain of command, and decisions and control passed down. Hence, in a departure from Chamber’s call for development staff to be facilitators (1995, 1997), project staff were often referred to as darag or ‘boss’ by local people. The primary roles of project staff reflected this hierarchical arrangement. Firstly, sum staff, typically members of the local community, used their inside knowledge and relationships to help select the ‘appropriate’ participants, and gather information.

102 For example, all the projects’ Ulaanbaatar and Aimag staff outnumbered the local staff at each project site.
Additionally, sum staff, as the gateway to the project’s material benefits, used this and their existing power to direct the day-to-day activities of the project, ensure people worked hard, and monitor group work. Thus, sum staff were similar to company (or negdel) supervisors; they controlled the project’s workers but were not authorised to make decisions independent of central management. Secondly, the project’s middle managers resided at the aimag level, their role being to supervise sum staff, to collate, analyse, and summarise information - which was then passed upwards - and to act as the project’s liaison within the local government. Finally, the project’s central management committee resided in Ulaanbaatar, and comprised of ‘experts’ who made fundamental decisions that controlled the project.

This hierarchical management structure was well-suited to, and contributed to the success of the projects for a variety of reasons. Firstly, because government institutions were also hierarchical the project’s different levels of management could exert their power and influence at an appropriate level. Secondly, the project’s decision-makers were outsiders to the local community, which meant their decisions were less likely to be affected by local networks of power. Thirdly, as CIs reported and Humphrey and Sneath (1999) suggest, a powerful leader is desired and revered in Mongolia. Hence, a hierarchically structured project whose leaders (staff) wield power brings both credence and respect to the project’s activities.

Provision

In this study the majority of interviewees understood that a key quality of the projects’ authoritarian structure was provision, similar to notions of patronage. Authors have suggested that patronage systems have been a part of pre-revolution Mongolian history (Sneath, 2002; Baabar, 2004), continued under Communism (Campi, 1996), and still operate with society today (Mearns, 2004a; Rossabi, 2005). In Projects A and B, the DO acted as a patron, providing organisation, resources, and knowledge in return for the participation (contributions of labour and information) of local people. Firstly, the project provided organisation by coordinating meetings, workshops, and the dispensing of resources, not an easy task given the distance and communication barriers in Mongolia. Secondly, the project provided resources, i.e. the physical start-up capital for activities, such as land, tractors, pigs, etc. Given the local context of poverty, this start-up capital would have proven highly difficult and risky for local people to access independently. For example, the poor in Mongolia are prevented from accessing financial credit given their lack of collateral, absence of business plans, and high interest rates of 26.3 percent per annum (IFAD, n.d.), and face difficulties in securing land tenure because of weak social connections. Thirdly, the project provided outside or ‘expert’
knowledge which was vital for local participants given that all three projects’ activities were based upon new and ‘foreign’ livelihood strategies. Small businesses/entrepreneurship and agriculture have never been a mainstay of Mongolia culture and economy (private business was prohibited and termed ‘immoral’ during the Communist era) and are often looked down upon and despised (Baabar, 1999; Goldstein & Beall, 1994; Campi, 1996). Small-scale mining is also a recent phenomenon (Upton, 2008b). Meanwhile, Project A’s livestock-related activities also required ‘outside’ knowledge, because, according to Mearns (2004a), many of the current herders are new, inexperienced herders with little knowledge of traditional herding practises. This organisation, resources, and knowledge could not have been accessed by local people independently; hence it was only through the projects’ provision that local people could gain the material benefits which they ultimately needed and desired.

5.2.5 Participation Necessitates Institutional Involvement

In this study staff understood that ‘participation’ extended beyond local people to include institutions at the local and national level. Critics argue that participatory methodology often privileges the ‘local’, so that local people are considered capable of anything (Cleaver, 1999) and are placed in isolation from the powerful socio-economic forces and political institutions which affect change in communities (Mohan & Stoke, 2000; Kapoor, 2002). However, in this study, the participation of institutions of authority in the design and implementation was deemed essential for the projects’ success and sustainability for practical reasons. Firstly, community organisations and the local and national governments participated in discussions with the DOs during the projects’ planning stages providing a different perspective to local problems, needs, and solutions. However, these institutions were not only included for purely information purposes, but also because, as local portals of power, the DO needed to establish a trusting relationship with them to gain permission to work amongst the local communities. Hence, meetings with institutions served a dual purpose of information gathering and trust building.

Secondly, rural land in Mongolia is not privately owned, but rather regulated by the local and national government through the issuing of land-use contracts (Mearns, 2004a; Schmidt, 2006). Long-term land tenure was needed for all the projects’ activities; therefore, a working relationship with the government paved the way to a secure land-use contract. Cleaver’s (1999) comment that the poor face very real structural and resource constraints which keep them entrenched in poverty certainly holds true in Mongolia. Hence, within the case studies, the DO acted as a powerful intermediary to negate governmental bureaucratic restraints to
secure land tenure for poor households. Such a process would have proven very difficult for those in poverty, be it financial, social, or physical, to achieve.

Thirdly, the local government leaders assisted in the projects’ selection processes. The project staff, being ‘outsiders’ to the local community, understood that they needed the help of these ‘insiders’ to identify potential participants and cross-check the information with which they provided the project. For example, within Project A, local herders, bag leaders, sum and aimag government officials, and project staff were all involved in the selection process to ensure a triangulation of data. This was needed as, far from notions of a ‘naturally benign’ poor community (Cleaver, 1999), staff reported participants would falsify information to access the material benefits a project was expected to bring. However, the projects were unable to fully hand over the selection process to local institutions because these institutions themselves were not trusted to be impartial. This lack of impartiality is due to the nepotism, cronyism, and corruption, common in Mongolian society (CIs; Sneath, 1999; Rossabi, 2005), and normative features of post-Socialist countries where networks of social obligation are prominent (Giordano & Kostova, 2002).

Fourthly, having identified a lack of regulation and insufficient policy framework to be key problems, Project C focused its activities at the institutional level. Project C’s staff echoed Kapoor’s (2002) suggestion that participatory projects should take a broader view of power, understanding that local people could only be empowered by “those who actually make decisions at the higher level” (Project C’s OM). Interestingly, the miners in Project C were the only local people to include government institutions in their understandings of participation. However, this arose not from an understanding that the local government would empower miners to make decisions, but rather because the local government was in the process of regulating the mining site.

Lastly, within Mongolia, it is normative and necessary for local institutions to be an influential factor in employment or livelihood strategies; for example, Sneath notes, “Traditionally, large-scale economic operations would almost have to be an ‘official’ rather than a ‘private’ matter” (2002, p. 203). It is normative because of Mongolians’ past experiences within a Communist structure and their hierarchical orientation where power for change resides in higher structures. Meanwhile, it is necessary because of the current situation of heavy state bureaucracy, a stunted private business sector, and diminished civil society. However, Sneath (1999) and Upton (2008a) suggest that the role government institutions play...
in rural people’s lives has in fact lessened in recent years. Thus, it can be seen that the development projects in Mongolia help fill this void, by not only providing services, but also by acting as a bridge or link between local people and local institutions. This bridge will orientate the institutions of authority and their services towards the poor, while enabling the poor to access these services through the DOs’ advocacy work.

5.2.6 Project C – Participation as an End Goal of Empowerment

In contrast to the dominant interpretation of participation outlined above, Project C’s Ulaanbaatar- and aimag-based staff interpreted participation as local decision-making for the purposes of empowerment. This arose from Project C’s overarching objectives which included the empowerment of local miners, and also the DO’s policy and procedures where ‘empowerment’ was listed as a key organisational mandate. Meanwhile, in response to recent advice and seminars from development experts, Project C had recommitted itself to a ‘bottom-up’, ‘grass-roots’, ‘participatory’ approach, which had subsequently resulted in changes to its management personnel.

Project C’s staff reported that, within this ‘participatory’ project, local miners were to make decisions which directly altered the project’s framework, in contrast to decision-making or choices within the project’s framework. Therefore, the DO’s role was to support the miners’ initiatives, and to facilitate their process of development. This interpretation of participation falls within Chambers’ concept of ‘we’ (development organisations) participating in ‘their’ (local peoples’) project (1995), and the common categorisation of participation as the ‘end goal’ of development (Nelson & Wright, 1995). In line with Chambers’ writings (1995, 2005) and Pretty’s typology (1995), Project C’s staff envisioned this type of participation as ‘empowering’, and defined empowerment and hence participation as, “the increased ability of miners to engage in the decision-making processes which affected their lives.” Once more reminiscent of Chambers’ writings, staff understood the project’s role as ‘facilitating’ the miners’ empowerment achieved by both building the miners’ decision-making capacity and providing them with opportunities to engage in decision-making processes. However, due to Mongolia’s weak institutional structures, and the recent appearance of artisanal small-scale mining as a rural livelihood strategy, the DO could not create decision-making opportunities for miners unless it also strengthened government institutions and created a specific policy and regulatory framework. This process was conceptualised as ‘empowering miners from above’ by staff.
Oakley (1991) and Shepherd (1998) differentiate between two types of empowerment, ‘systems maintaining’, where the development of skills and abilities enable rural people to negotiate within existing development delivery systems, and ‘systems transforming’, where rural people decide upon and take actions independent of current development delivery systems. The interpretation of empowerment in Project C fits with the ‘systems maintaining’ categorisation as the project’s activities would allow miners to negotiate better within the local and national government and the DO. However, empowerment here could also be understood as ‘systems establishing’, as through the project the government systems which control and regulate the mining industry were created and strengthened.

Staff interpretations also corresponded to the delineation of empowerment into ‘power over’, ‘power to’, ‘power with’, and ‘power within’ commonly found in development literature (Nelson & Wright 1995; Rowlands, 1995, 1997; Chambers, 2005). To reiterate, ‘power over’ refers to one’s ability to control, influence, and dominate, and in this sense empowerment “…is bringing those who are outside the decision-making process into it” (Rowland, 1997, p. 13). Staff understood ‘power over’ empowerment occurred when miners, who were outcasts of society, were given the opportunity to make decisions and control Project C. In addition, because of Project C’s institutional focus, miners gained further ‘power over’ as they influenced the government’s decision-making processes. Secondly, ‘power to’ is commonly defined as ‘generative or productive power’ (Rowlands, 1997), i.e. the potential of people to shape, direct, and control their own lives. Staff understood miners would gain ‘power to’ empowerment as the project increased their capacity to make the most of any decision-making opportunities. This increase in capacity would come from ‘power with’ empowerment, which is the solidarity and collective voice attained from organisation into groups, and also from knowledge about the local situation and government processes. Such group solidarity and knowledge was then seen to lead to ‘power within’ empowerment as the miners’ self confidence and self worth grew.

**Theoretical Barriers to Empowerment**

While a number of practical barriers to participation and the empowerment of local participants within Project C existed (see Section: 5.4.2), theoretical barriers to ‘empowerment’ were also present. Firstly, authors such as Rowlands (1997) argue that empowerment cannot be bestowed from the more powerful, therefore within empowering projects control and direction must come from local people, which means projects will take unexpected turns. However, in Project C the DO had structured and controlled the outcomes
and activities of empowerment because as a ‘project’ it required upward accountability, results and timeframes. Likewise, the DO needed to be, in itself, a ‘powerful’ structure to negotiate on behalf of miners and gain respect within the institutional environment in which it worked. Secondly, staff reported that, in addition to ‘participatory’, the project had adopted a ‘grass roots’ approach. As a ‘grass roots’ project, activities were to be based solely on the miners’ initiatives and resources, and therefore no outside material resources would be given to miners. Staff firmly believed that ‘grass roots’, ‘participatory’, or ‘development’ projects only gave participants ‘software’, defined as knowledge and workshops, rather than ‘hardware’, defined as material resources. Hence a paradox emerged, miners were seen to make decisions which altered the project’s framework but these decisions had to be ratified by management staff to ensure they fitted within the DO’s interpretation of ‘grass roots’ or ‘participatory’. Thus, as other authors have found, top-down control was needed to ensure bottom-up development took place (see Nelson & Wright, 1995).

Another theoretical paradox in Project C concerned the sequence of empowerment. Development literature often conceptualises empowerment as sequential in nature; ‘power to’ combines with ‘power with’ which leads to ‘power over’ which results in ‘power within’. For instance, Friedman writes, “Political empowerment would seem to require a prior process of social empowerment” (1992, p. 34), and Rowlands states, “Individuals are empowered when they are able to maximise opportunities available to them without constraints” (1997, p. 13). While staff alluded to this need for a sequence of empowerment, in reality increases in the miners’ decision-making capacity, i.e. ‘power to’, did not take place before opportunities to engage in decision-making processes (‘power over’) had occurred. Hence, miners were unable to fully engage with decision-making opportunities that occurred early in the project, which stifled their ‘power over’ empowerment.

Perhaps the foremost barrier preventing ‘power to’ empowerment concerned the DO’s theory that material or economic benefits did not lead to, but resulted from, empowerment, a theory which ran contrary to the miners’ prioritisation of visible material resources and benefits. Economic security has been described as part of ‘power to’ empowerment, i.e. finance leads to greater choices and thus an increased capacity to shape one’s world (Friedman, 1992; Rowlands, 1997). Moreover, economic security can enable the poor to make better use of decision-making opportunities because of associated increases in free time, health, education, etc. According to staff, Project C had provided economic security for the miners from the local sum because it had secured permission for them to work at Altan. However, for the
miners, in reality nothing had changed, as there were in fact no visible, immediate, material gains from the project. Meanwhile, miners expected and prioritised material resources from the project because of the staff’s promises, past experiences of projects, cultural norms, and their position of extreme poverty. Hence, there was little incentive for miners to participate in activities that Project C had theorised would bring ‘power to’ or ‘power over’ empowerment. Thus, while Project C’s theory of empowerment had led the project to conduct activities to increase the decision-making ability of miners, it had simultaneously failed to provide an effective motive to lead miners to participate in activities of which they could not see the benefit.

Other Stakeholder Understandings of Empowerment

This understanding of participation as empowerment was not uniform among the stakeholders in Project C. In contrast to the management staff, local staff and local miners held to the dominant interpretation of participation as “contributions of group labour and information for material benefits, within a top-down authoritarian structure (including local institutions).” Meanwhile, the aimag staff member, the connector between management staff in Ulaanbaatar and local staff, held to both interpretations, explaining bottom-up, decentralised decision-making, while also maintaining that the project had to make decisions and should provide material resources to miners. These contrasting and fluid interpretations of participation amongst the actors in Project C stemmed from a number of sources. Firstly, according to staff, Project C was initially identified, designed, and implemented in a top-down manner similar to Projects A and B. Secondly, while aimag- and Ulaanbaatar-based staff had attended seminars and workshops on the ‘grass-roots’ and ‘participatory’ approach, local staff had not. Thirdly, Project C’s local staff had been selected from, or worked within, local governments to whom a top-down authoritarian management was normative and incentive driven. Fourthly, local miners, being no different from other poor rural Mongolians, expected and desired a top-down project which delivered material resources and benefits.

5.2.7 Participation as a Tool for Empowerment

While Project C envisioned higher-levels of participation, like decision-making, as bringing empowerment, the findings of this study indicate that lower-levels of participation which brought tangible benefits could also result in empowerment. The goals of Projects A and B were not the empowerment of local people, but rather the improvement of food security and income generation. However, within these two projects, where participation was conceptualised as a ‘tool’ for the development project, the empowerment of local participants
was evident both theoretically and practically. This result runs contrary to Chambers’ concept of empowerment arising from independent decision-making and Pretty’s typology (1995), and are similar in regards to writings by Hayward et al. (2004) and Nelson and Wright who note, “In [participation as a ‘tool’] approaches participants’ ‘power to’, their confidence in themselves, their personal and collective abilities to exercise power within existing structural and institutional constraints can undoubtedly be enhanced” (1995, p. 17).

Notions of empowerment evident in Projects A and B can be categorised as ‘systems maintaining’, as the projects worked within and with local structures of authority, while the DOs maintained overall control. ‘Systems maintaining’ empowerment was normative for local people, as were the various forms of empowerment gained in Projects A and B which were also desirable because they were associated with manifest material resources and benefits. ‘Power to’ empowerment occurred as local participants gained a new livelihood strategy which resulted in material benefits such as food and cash-income. These material benefits increased local participants’ ability to shape and change their world, or exercise power within existing structures; for example, food and income provided choices, i.e. save money, invest in goats, buy medicine, etc. Group work not only brought about ‘power with’ empowerment in the form of solidarity and collective action, but it meant material benefits were increased through scales of economy and pooled labour. Meanwhile, group work built social capital which expanded participants’ *tandag humuus* network and allowed for sustainable and further provisions of tangible and intangible benefits. Lastly ‘power within’ empowerment, described as increased confidence and self worth, eventuated as through the project’s efforts a new skill, or livelihood option, was not only learnt but actualised.\(^{103}\)

The empowerment of local participants in Project A and B occurred because these projects provided local people with a less risky, controlled, sheltered environment in which to learn a new livelihood skill. For local people, without the project, the adoption of these livelihood strategies would have proven difficult due to the substantial capital requirements and significant risks. For example, a livelihood derived from vegetables requires a capital investment of land, seeds, tools, and irrigation, as well as horticultural and marketing knowledge, but is also risky because crop failure would threaten food security and compromise repayments for capital loans. A change in livelihoods is therefore beyond the

\(^{103}\) Providing a skill while also ensuring this skill brings material benefits is especially important to ‘power within’ empowerment as many Mongolians professionally trained during the Communist era (such as engineers, etc.) are still unemployed.
reach of poor rural Mongolians. However, in Project’s A and B, physical capital was gifted to participants, knowledge, guidance, and control were also provided, and family splitting could still occur. Hence, the project negated the risks and obstacles associated with a new livelihood strategy.

After local people exited the project they were left with skills, resources, and group social capital to continue on in their new livelihoods, which would have to exist without the project’s guidance, control, and resources. Thus, post-project an opportunity existed for former participants to be further empowered as they made autonomous decisions outside the project’s confines. However, the occasion for disempowerment also existed. Under the auspices of the projects, group activities existed in somewhat of a ‘project’ bubble – protected from a real world environment, as the projects primarily provided ‘everything’. For example, the major capital investments were given, not loaned, to the groups. Hence, these livelihood strategies were not born, tried, or tested in a ‘real world’ environment. This meant, once left without the projects’ buffer, these livelihoods may prove unsustainable, which would result in the disempowerment of local participants.

5.3 Perceptions of the Benefits of Participation

The results of this study indicated that, for the majority of stakeholders interviewed, the tangible, material benefits of participation held primacy over intangible benefits, as one local participant commented, “You can’t eat empowerment”. Typically, though, staff had a broader concept of benefits which went beyond materials to include intangibles, like knowledge and skills, self belief, social connections, and organisation. These intangibles were also mentioned in local participant interviews, but only as a gateway to, multiplier of, or derivative from material benefits, rather than as being benefits in their own right. The primacy of tangible benefits in this study is complimentary to a number of alternative development paradigms. For instance, Amartya Sen reports that increased income is still pivotal in bringing freedom to the poor as it increases their capabilities of promoting or achieving valuable functions (1999). Other authors, while consistently stressing the multidimensionality of human poverty and development, view economic security as one of the most basic human needs and values (Narayan, Chambers, Shah, & Petesch, 2000; Alkire, 2002). Meanwhile, Abraham Malsow in his classic Hierarchy of Needs (1943) views economic and food security as a primitive or
‘safety and security’ need, which must be met first before intangible needs such as confidence and problem solving can be realised.

5.3.1 Tangible Benefits

In this study it was the tangible material benefits provided through the creation of a safe, less risky project environment that were prioritised by all local participants and the majority of staff. When questioned about the benefits of participating in the projects, local people immediately, enthusiastically, and gratefully spoke of tangible benefits. Given the local circumstances of poverty, lack of rural employment options, and the existence of a belen setgeltay, it is unsurprising that local people automatically associated ‘development organisations’ with the bestowal of tangible benefits.

A number of findings associated with the primacy of tangible benefits emerged from this study. Firstly, tangible benefits were conceptualised into two forms by local participants, which could be called material resources and material benefits. Material resources were the physical gifts which the project gave participants during its early stages, such as spades, tractors, seeds, finance, etc. It seems that it was these material resources that participants initially conceptualised as the tangible benefits of the project (or the promise of them) and acted as a motivational tool that drew local people into the project. In the projects’ later stages, material resources combined with knowledge to generate material benefits, such as income and food. Thus, as local participants moved through the project, their concept of tangible benefits changed from that of material resources to the material benefits of their new livelihood strategies. A possible explanation for this change is the Mongolian short-term orientation described by CIs, which means that the immediate and visible benefits are prioritised.

Secondly, it was apparent that material resources which remained ‘group’ or ‘project’ property were less well-looked after and seen as a hang-over effect of collective ownership and state provision during Communist era. Thirdly, material resources which did not directly have a positive impact on participants’ livelihoods were less likely to be considered a tangible benefit, for example, the cultural ger and books in Project C. In a similar vein, the provision of land in the projects, a crucial material benefit, was also less commonly identified,  

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104 Project staff reported that property which was given to individuals rather than the group was better maintained.
perhaps because land has, and still is, considered a common property resource by the majority of Mongolians (Mearns, 2004a).

5.3.2 Intangible Benefits

In this study the intangible benefits were, with little or no prompting, enthusiastically recalled by development staff. In contrast, local participants were significantly less forthcoming and spoke only of intangibles after substantial prompting or in an indirect manner. Across the DOs’ hierarchical structure (sum, aimag, Ulaanbaatar) it was the staff furthest from local participants (geographically and socially) that gave a more detailed description of these intangible benefits. A number of possible explanations exist for this differentiation: firstly, non-field-based staff did not see local participants as often; hence, changes, such as self-confidence, etc., were more striking; secondly, management staff were exposed to development theories and accountable to funding agencies where intangibles are held in high regard; and thirdly, local staff live alongside local participants and are exposed to their poverty, and as such prioritised material benefits.

Across the stakeholders of all three case studies four key intangible benefits were evident: knowledge/mental investment, ‘power within’, social connections, and groups.

Knowledge/Mental Investment

Knowledge, also termed ‘mental investment’, was the most commonly identified intangible benefit. Across the projects, knowledge was interpreted as a benefit or coined ‘knowledge’ by local people only when it was taught in a practical manner by ‘experts’ (staff members or respected peers) and could directly result in increased material benefits. In this regard, knowledge involved building practical skills which increased local participants’ capacity for material gains, rather than knowledge for knowledge’s sake. For example, knowledge disseminated through books in Project C was either not identified as a benefit, or, if so, was conceptualised as simply a ‘book’ because it was not transferred practically and in person, and had not brought material gains. Important in the conversion of knowledge to a ‘skill’ for local participants was the delivery mechanism, with the vital components including repeated practical demonstrations, hands-on learning, close supervision, and a continuing intimate relationship between teacher and student. Additionally, knowledge delivered in this way
helped remove major obstacles to learning among herders, such as low reading and writing abilities, risk aversion, and the relative ‘strangeness’ of new livelihood strategies.

Within Projects A and B, it appeared that a sequential dissemination of knowledge allowed for the maximum uptake of material benefits. As such, a knowledge pyramid was formed (see Figure: 13). Initially, local participants gained the practical, technical knowledge about the new livelihood. Next, material benefits were increased as local participants learnt to work in groups which allowed the pooling of labour and resources. Then, in preparation for life outside the project’s safe, controlled environment, local participants learnt basic marketing and business principles. Thus, during the project’s implementation stage, each level of knowledge formed the base for the next section of knowledge which allowed for increased, and later, sustained material benefits.

**Figure 13: An Example of the Knowledge Pyramid in Project B**

- Knowledge on how to work in a group situation
- The basic practical or ‘technical’ knowledge on how to grow vegetables
- Basic business and marketing knowledge
- Knowledge of cooperatives
- Ensuring the sustainability of benefits
- Increasing material benefits
- Time in project

‘Power Within’

Inner-changes of self-confidence, self-esteem, and hope amongst local participants were also reported. These feelings are akin to the ‘power within’ form of empowerment described as ‘self worth and confidence’ by Chambers (2005) and ‘spiritual strength within’ by Rowlands (1997). As previously discussed, this increase of ‘power within’ came within a top-down,

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105 The word strangeness is used here as it is the direct translation of the Mongolia term ‘сонин’ (sonin) which carries the connotation of something foreign, new, interesting, or queer (Global Dictionary, n.d.).
rather than bottom-up, project and arose as local participants gained a new livelihood strategy (see Section: 5.2.7). These inner changes were not ethereal but had visible expression. It was keenly noted by staff that after participating in the project, local people were no longer shy or embarrassed, but could talk freely and openly express their opinions amongst themselves and to staff and government officials. Hope for the future was also a common feature in interviews, as through their involvement in the projects, local peoples’ horizons, capabilities, and therefore future possibilities had been expanded, which led them to talk about future livelihood ideas and plans both within and outside the projects’ framework.

Social Connections/Social Capital

The increased social connections which enhance the social capital of local participants were also commonly interpreted as a benefit by staff and local people. To reiterate, ‘social capital’, is the social networks, norms (of cooperation and reciprocity), and trust which people utilise for productive purposes. According to Grootaert et al. (2004), social capital contains three distinctions: ‘bonding’ (connections between people who are of the same demographic and are known to one another), ‘bridging’ (connections between people who are unknown), and ‘linking’ (connections to people in authority). All these forms of social capital were reported as growing during the project, and therefore a major project benefit was the expansion of participants’ tandag humuus networks.

Social connections were established, strengthened, and maintained through the projects’ formal, structured activities and associated social opportunities. The projects’ formal activities of workshops, seminars, and group labour brought local participants together with a shared vision and purpose for a substantial period of time. Within these shared activities participants were not solely learning and working, but also socialising and interacting as they learnt and worked. Meanwhile, tea breaks, shared meals, group celebrations, etc., gave further opportunities for participants to mingle and talk. Through these events social connections, or ‘bonding’ and ‘bridging’ social capital, were increased as old acquaintances were renewed, existing relationships strengthened, and new friendships struck. For many participants because of distance, a culture of movement, and a lack of clubs and societies, no space for repeated socialising existed beyond the project. Thus the projects filled this void, by not only providing a space for socialising but also a tangible reason for local people to occupy it.

106 In Mongolian terms, participants had gone from ‘нүүр хагарсан’(nuur hagarcan) to ‘нүүр хагарсангуу’ (nuur hagarcanguul) people.
107 Varying definitions of social capital abound (see Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Mansuri & Rao, 2004); however, according to Upton (2008a) norms, trust, and social networks form the core of most definitions.
Amongst the projects’ activities, interactions between different sectors in society existed which resulted in the potential for ‘linking’ social capital to be built. Because project groups were comprised of people from different layers of society, the more powerful group members became ‘linking’ social capital for the group and its poorer members. For example, a vegetable group’s leader, who is also a government worker, could use his/her connections to secure water and land, and could also help poorer members of the group as he/she is integrated into their tandag humuus network. In addition, some of the projects’ activities had brought local government officials and participants together and created the opportunity for linkages to form. Furthermore, staff reported that over the projects’ lifespan, local participants learnt how to interact and speak with people in authority, which gave them the capacity to make the most out of these and future linking opportunities. These opportunities for linkages were vitally important to the sustainability of the projects’ benefits as they would enable participants to access powerful people once the project, and with it its power, had exited. However, given the mistrust rural people had of local officials, the local governance structure, and the culture’s high power distance orientation, the transforming of linking opportunities to actual functioning linkages which brought power to local people could be a lengthy and difficult process.

These findings confirm the research of Upton (2008a), Ykhanbai and Bulgan (2006), and Schmidt (2006a) who found that projects in Mongolia allowed for herder-herder and herder-government linkages to take place. However, while these authors noted it was the PRA discussions which created this social capital, in this study evidence suggests that social capital between participants can equally be built simply by time spent together. This shared time may include PRA style exercises but in these projects it typically entailed times where participants worked, learned, socialised, and even waited together. Many of the projects’ activities, therefore, had an undercover but vitally important secondary function of building social capital, which in turn reinforced the prime objective of these activities which was to generate substantial and sustainable material benefits.

Groups

The organisation of local participants into ‘groups’, for instance, work groups, business groups, cooperatives, NGOs, was understood by staff and local people as another key intangible benefit. Two clear benefits of ‘groups’ emerged across the three case studies and appeared in both staff and local participant interviews. Firstly, as mentioned previously,
‘groups’ were associated with the increase and sustainability of economic benefits. Secondly, ‘groups’ also performed a ‘social’ function (see above: Social connections/social capital), a finding highlighted in Ykhanbai and Bulgan’s case study (2006). Group members worked together, but also spent time with one another in the social rituals of daily living, eating, talking, and laughing together. These two distinct group benefits were apparent in the language interviewees used when speaking of project groups. While some people used terms like brigade, ‘community labour’, and ‘small business group’, which highlight economic benefits, others spoke in terms of ‘friendship’, ‘herder’, ‘united’, or ‘intimate’ groups which point to the social benefits. Meanwhile, Project C staff, with their ‘empowerment’ focus, also saw groups as an organisation structure which provided miners a greater voice in society and government decision making processes.

5.3.3 Non-Local Benefits
Research (Nelson & Wright, 1995; Mosse, 2001) has shown that non-local participants often benefit significantly from development projects, and this finding was, to a small degree, present in this study. It was understood by a few interviewees that project staff benefitted from the project as they had professional, relatively well-paid, employment and gained skills and experience. While interviewees in Projects A and B did not begrudge staff their salaries, a number of local participants in Project C obviously resented what they saw as ‘high paid’ staff from ‘Ulaanbaatar’. This was not simply because of the staff’s higher standard of living, but because the staff’s clothes, cars, and salaries became offensive in light of a project which had not delivered on promises of material benefits. Additionally, the local government was seen to benefit as projects brought increased income into the local community. Meanwhile, interviewees also reported that local government officials had used the project’s activities to assist them in their own political ambitions, a finding which has been likewise reported in development literature (Marsland, 2006).

5.3.4 Priority of Benefits
Within this study three main contrasting viewpoints on the priority of benefits emerged: Projects A and B staff, local participants of all three projects, and Project C’s staff. Staff in Project A and B prioritised sustainable improvements to local livelihoods through increased income and food security, the objectives of both projects (see Figure: 14). It was understood that these improvements could only come about if local participants received both mental capital (knowledge and skills) and physical capital (material resources). Equal importance
was placed on both mental and physical capital, as staff reported that, if provided in isolation, neither benefit would be sufficient to achieve the livelihood objectives. The timing of benefits was also crucial; first came mental capital, followed by physical capital, which allowed for the new knowledge and skills to develop into a livelihood. Meanwhile, social connections, although not reported as a priority by staff, were frequently mentioned in interviews and casual conversations. Social connections, rather than being a specific project input or planned intervention, occurred naturally within activities. These social connections became, in effect, the third sub-benefit of the project, the social capital or glue which held project groups together and enabled benefits to continue past the projects’ lifetimes.

Figure 14: Project A and B’s Staff Priorities of Local Benefits

The local participants interviewed clearly prioritised tangible benefits above all else (see Figure: 15). At the outset of the projects, local people focused on the immediate material resources that the project gifted to them. In fact, these material resources acted as the major incentive, drawing people into the project. It seems that this prioritisation is not only a reflection of participants’ poverty, but also the culture of short-term orientation and the disconnection between actions and consequence to which CIs referred. As the projects progressed and these material resources combined with knowledge to provide income and food security, local participants prioritised these latter material benefits of the project. The other benefits recalled (group work, outside facilitation, work groups, workshops, knowledge, and skills) ran a distant second, and were only prioritised or mentioned because they enabled participants to access material benefit.
Figure 15: Local Peoples’ Priorities of Benefits

Staff in Project C, with exposure to ‘grass roots’, ‘bottom-up’ and ‘participatory’ development theories, clearly prioritised the benefit of ‘empowerment’. Empowerment was defined as ‘the increased capacity and opportunity to influence decisions that affect livelihoods’ (See Figure: 16). This definition did not include the provision of material resources to participants, and thus bears stark contrast to the other two benefit priority trees, where empowerment is not prioritised but stemmed from the provision of material benefits to local people.

Note: Tangible benefits were prioritised and all other benefits were primarily recognised for their links to these tangibles.
5.4 Factors Influencing Participation

This study found that there was a complex, diverse set of factors which influenced local people’s participation in the three projects. While the influences on participation were dynamic, multifarious, and therefore distinct to each individual, for the purposes of clarity they will be generalised and discussed in two categories: motivations to participate, and barriers to participation. However, while these categorisations are helpful it is important to note that, depending on the uniqueness of the individual, barriers can become motivations and vice versa. Despite the vacillating nature of these influences, very distinct themes emerged out of the similarities and differences between the three projects.

5.4.1 Motivations to Participate

This study found that local people were motivated to participate in the development projects because of both economic and social reasons, with the former proving more fundamental. It is important to note that although people may have strong incentives or motivations to participate in development projects, any number of resource and socio-cultural constraints may prevent them from doing so (Oakley, 1991). In the case study projects, once local people had navigated through a diverse set of participation obstacles (see Section: 5.4.2), had proven themselves to be ‘appropriate’ participants, and were selected by the DOs, they faced continued participation choices. Local people could choose to join the project, or not, they could leave the project at any time, and they could choose the amount of participatory effort
to invest. Hence, the economic and social motivations were multi-dimensional and dynamic, influencing people to join, remain, and invest in the project.

In development literature three motivating factors\textsuperscript{108} for participation choices have been suggested: ‘economic rationality’, where people calculate it is in their best interests economically to participate; ‘sociality’ where motivations are non-economic and derived from societal and cultural norms or psychological incentives (self-respect, purpose, recognition); and ‘polity’ where people are motivated by an opportunity to exert influence in decision-making processes (Oakley, 1991; Brett, 1996; Cleaver, 1999). In this study, local peoples’ participation choices were strongly influenced by the economic sphere. Participation was chosen if the economic benefits (the tangible benefits) of the projects outweighed the cost (time, energy, and resources) and proved more profitable than other livelihood options on offer. However, non-economic or ‘social’ incentives were also influential. For example, widespread, detailed, and positive information about the project, the power, leadership, and organisation of the DO, the relationship between staff and local people, and finally the nature of the project’s workshops and seminars all guided people’s participation choices. Meanwhile, motivations based on ‘polity’ were not evident in interviews outside those with Project C management staff. This is because decision-making both in, and outside, the project spheres did not fit into the dominant ‘Mongolia’ interpretation of participation, and in Project C the economic and social incentives were insufficient for miners to engage with polity ideals. Therefore, the results of this study suggest a motivation or incentive triangle, whereby economic, social, and political factors affect participation choices sequentially (see Figure: 17).

\textsuperscript{108} Motivations for participation choices are sometimes described in terms of the individual, for example, the ‘rational economic man’ (Cleaver, 1999). However, in line with Friedman’s writings (1992) in this study choices were based on the household sphere.
5.4.1.1 Economic Motivations

Tangible Benefits in a Context of Poverty and Unemployment

This study revealed an expectation of tangible benefits as the underlying incentive for participation choices. This affirms Oakley’s stress on the importance of a project’s ‘economic base’ which acts as an incentive, develops confidence and solidarity of participants, and gives project a strong central focus (1991, p. 199). In the case studies, the promise of material handouts drew people into the projects, while the longer-term material outputs of the projects’ activities facilitated people’s continuing commitment and encouraged their increased effort. Not unexpectedly, rather than just the ‘tangibility’ of benefits, it was the nature and substance of the material benefits which were truly motivational. Key benefit characteristics for local participants included material resources that were gifted rather than loaned, material benefits that met basic needs (income and food security), and material benefits that could be accessed through household splitting – which in turn allowed households to continue in, or diversify into other important livelihood strategies, such as herding. With other similar projects available, or non-participation an option, local participants had chosen participation in these projects because the tangibles on offer were better than the other alternatives. For example, Project A gifted, rather than loaned, material resources; in Project B a larger vegetable plot meant income generation benefits instead of solely subsistence benefit; and in Project C, participation enabled continued mining at Altan, considered more profitable than other mining sites in the region.
The current local context within which the projects operated also facilitated participation by making the projects’ activities especially attractive to a certain portion of rural society. In this regard the findings of this study supported Upton’s (2008a) conclusions that it was the timeliness of the projects’ interventions in Mongolia’s rural context of poverty and dire circumstances which made the tangible benefits of participation so appealing. Due to the recent zuuds which forced people out of herding, the rural Mongolian context is dominated by unemployment and poverty, and for most people few livelihood options exist outside of livestock herding and informal mining. For these rural Mongolians the more substantive tangible benefits, i.e. income, outweighed the higher costs of participation, such as time, energy, and benefit latency. Hence, a major motivational factor for local people’s participation was not only a context of limited opportunities but also the availability of sufficient resources (time, tandag humuus, etc.) which they could utilise to join and remain in the project.

It addition, it appeared that participants, independent of whether they were herders or ex-herders, were motivated by a cash-generating project for two different reasons. Firstly, one group of people were motivated to participate so they could re-enter or continue in livestock herding, as surplus cash generated was used to rebuild livestock herds. In contrast, another group was motivated to participate as they wished to diversify away from a livelihood strategy heavily dependent on livestock, which was in their eyes becoming increasingly risky and less profitable. Thus, although livestock herding has formed the cultural, social, and economic base of Mongolia for centuries (Baabar, 1999), some herders had understood the need for diversification because of worsening climatic conditions, over stocking, and falling prices and had joined the projects as a result.

5.4.1.2 Non-Economic or Social Motivations

Information

Information that was widespread, detailed, and positive was influential in local peoples’ participation choices. Firstly, information about the projects’ activities that was widely disseminated in the selected regions provided more opportunity for the targeted populace to participate in the project. Because of the associated communication difficulties (distance, poor radio and television coverage, etc.) methods such as information booths and the distribution of flyers at local festivals and utilising local government networks proved very effective. Moreover, to facilitate initial and continued participation, information needed to be comprehensive, detailing the projects’ sequence of activities and expected outcomes. This
detail prevented local people, who expected immediate material handouts, from joining and then exiting the project once preconceived expectations went unmet, and also provided the motivational force for ‘transitory’ or ‘nomadic’ people to persevere through non-productive activities (workshops, etc).

Positive information about the DOs and their activities, from a number of different sources, also provided an incentive for joining. Similar to findings by Upton (2008a), Ykhanbai and Bulgan (2006), and Schmidt (2006a) this study showed peer-to-peer exchanges were highly important. A number of local people reported that their decisions to participate were based upon both the verbal recommendations of friends, relatives, and community members who had participated in these or similar projects, and the visible material benefits they saw the project had brought these peers. Meanwhile, local staff also played a facilitating role. Typically, local staff members were selected from the local communities because they were not only qualified for this role but were also well respected. Interviewees expressed mistrust of development agencies and Ulaanbaatar-based institutions that typically promised much but delivered little. Therefore, local staff members were important motivating agents as they put a local, trustworthy face to the DO and its activities, interacted daily with local people, and could provide correct, up-to-date information.

**Power, Leadership, and Organisation of the DO**

The power, leadership, and organisation of the DOs proved key factors in facilitating local people to join, remain, and contribute equally to the projects. As stated previously, local participants faced substantial obstacles to engaging in new livelihood strategies independent of outside assistance. The promises of the projects therefore provided local people with an unrivalled opportunity to increase their livelihoods. However, a commitment to the projects still involved costs in the form of time, energy, and resources, for rewards which were not immediate or necessarily guaranteed. Hence, it was the DO’s reputation and capacity to turn promises and plans into actualised livelihood benefits which motivated people. Local people perceived the DOs as capable of delivering on their livelihood promises due to their power, resources (material, knowledge, technology, expertise, social connections, etc.), organisational aptitude, and leadership skills. Furthermore, because the DOs were non-governmental and ‘foreign’-based organisations, some interviewees perceived them as trustworthy and resource-rich compared with Mongolian agencies, and, therefore, more capable of fulfilling promises.
The power, leadership, and organisation of the DO also provided both an economic and social motivation for participation choices. In line with ‘rational choice’ theory, working within a DO which had a hierarchical power structure, brought increased economic benefits to participants (Brett, 1996). Top-down decision-making undertaken by the DO was advantageous to local people because they themselves did not possess the required experience or skills to ensure the profitability of these new livelihoods, or the resources to cope with, and learn from, any failures. Hence, as Brett (1996) suggests, it was quicker and more profitable to let a select group of ‘experts’ (the project staff and group leaders) make decisions and organise people as it cut down on lengthy participatory decision-making processes which had high associated costs (Oakley, 1991). In addition, the presence of a DO helped mitigate common group problems, such as free-rider behaviour, malfeasance, and corruption because the DO’s power and leadership enabled the establishment and enforcement of group rules and provided an incentive to work hard. This outside ‘work’ motivation was seen as especially important, as according to interviewees, and perhaps linked to the Socialist period. Mongolians worked significantly harder when leadership was present, especially leadership which had the power to determine the provision and division of resources.

For local participants, the collective aspects of working together for the common ‘good’, and for the glory of the project proved a social incentive for participation. A recurring theme through local participants’ interviews was the unique worthiness of working together. For participants there was something morally right, even culturally appropriate, about shared experiences where difficulties were faced collectively in pursuit of a commonly held purpose. In line with these libertarian ideals of solidarity and comradeship (Wade, 1992), it seemed participants were motivated by the projects’ activities because they were for the good of others, or undertaken to bring glory to the project rather than the individual. This form of social motivation is a reflection of Mongolia’s ‘group’, or collectivist orientation, where the group is more important than the individual (Dodd, 1998), as well as its Communist heritage. According to CIs and literature, during the Communist era, people were strongly encouraged to live and carry out one’s duties for the good of the ‘party’ (nam) and for ‘others’ and discouraged from individualistic thoughts and actions (Bumaa, 2001). For example, one interviewee recalled, “In socialism everything had to be done for the nam, our songs, our worship, at school, at work, everything had to be done for the glory of the nam…. We used to have a slogan ‘One person for others, others for one.’”

Encouragement took the form of books, poems, songs, propaganda posters, political slogans, medals, awards, etc.
Relationship with Staff

This study found that a deep, personal relationship between project staff and local participants was a key reason why participants remained active in the projects. These findings support the research of Hailey (2001) on South Asian NGOs, who concluded that friendship, trust, and respect between local people and staff, built through regular informal contact, personal ties, and shared values were instrumental to the success of development projects. Relationship, according to CIIs and literature, is a cornerstone of Mongolian ‘collectivist’ society, a societal lubricant which makes daily tasks flow easier and is built through repeated interactions, reciprocity, hospitality, reputation, and shared connections (Hofstede & Hofstede, 1991; Humphrey & Sneath 1999). In the three case studies, staff and local participants alike placed a high value on relationship which seemed to be built via a number of project channels. Firstly, relationships were established through regular, personal interactions. While interactions did take place in the formal ‘participatory’ type workshops, it seems that it was the more informal interactions which facilitated the building of relationships. These included visits to local peoples’ homes, the exchange of hospitality (shared meals provided by both local people and staff), non-project orientated conversations (i.e. a ‘normal’ Mongolian conversation), work alongside one another, and field-based workshops. Secondly, relationships were strengthened as project staff delivered on promises (particularly regarding material goods) and hence, trust was built. Finally, it was also the attitude of staff which enabled shared times to build relationship, as interviewees praised staff for being interested in, paying close attention to, respecting, and worrying about local people. Time, therefore, was a key factor, as regular, longer interactions between staff and local people allowed for more natural, and hence, deeper relationships to form.

The DOs in this study indicated that having locally chosen and locally-based project staff was a prime way to build relationships with local participants. Whilst this was true, the mere presence of a local staff member(s) only provided the opportunity for relationships to be built. For example, in Project C, although local staff were a component of the project’s strategy, their lack of power, daily interactions with local people, and follow-through on promises proved detrimental to the forming of meaningful relationships. Additionally, the results indicated that some form of connection or relationship between local participants and the aimag/Ulaanbaatar staff was also vital. For example, in Projects A and B, where staff were spoken of highly, local people typically knew aimag and Ulaanbaatar Staff and recalled with fondness times where they had not just visited but interacted with them; while in Project C, the opposite was true. It seems that while local participants respected, and desired centrally-
based or ‘outside’, powerful leaders, it was important that these leaders had, what one CI described as, “a heart for the people.”

**Workshops and Seminars**
The nature of the workshops and seminars was also a factor in retaining people within the projects. While skill-based knowledge, acquired from workshops and seminars, was seen as a benefit, it was the method in which these were carried out which encouraged attendance and caused people to look more favourably on the project. Firstly, workshops and seminars which specifically tailored to the rural environment functioned most effectively. This meant they needed to be held outside peak rural work periods, such as lambing and cashmere season, and needed to take the form of short, block courses (two to three days) which were long enough to make travel worthwhile, but short enough to ensure other non-project duties would not be jeopardised. Additionally, workshops and seminars which had a set, clear purpose and were planned well in advance, allowing for transport and labour cover to be arranged, further encouraged participation. Secondly, workshops and seminars that were pragmatic in nature, based upon examples and practical demonstrations rather than theoretical learning appealed to rural participants. This was because participants were primarily herders, whose limited literacy and numeracy skills inhibited their ability to learn from text, and were not accustomed to classroom based learning. Thirdly, it seemed that ‘peer’ teachers provided a worthwhile supporting role to the projects’ ‘expert’ teachers. While ‘expert’ teachers were respected and seen as possessors of scientific knowledge, ‘peer’ teachers as successful project participants showed local people a real-life example of the positive effects of participation. Meanwhile, these ‘peer’ teachers helped allay local people’s risk-averse nature and mistrust of formal organisations. Lastly, workshops and seminars that were carried out in a hospitable, open-ended, friendly manner greatly facilitated local peoples’ attendance and endeared the project and its staff to them. Hospitality, generosity, and relationship are all cornerstones of Mongolian, especially rural, culture (Humphrey & Sneath, 1999; Stewart, 2000). Workshops and seminars where tea, coffee, and food were provided and served by project staff, and games and celebrations were incorporated, helped to create a congenial, warm atmosphere much appreciated by participants. Meanwhile, workshops, seminars and meetings with flexible, open-ended timeframes were more suited to Mongolian culture’s polychronic time orientation in which relationships are prioritised over pre-set schedules (Dodd, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 2006).

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110 ‘Peer’ teachers in the case study project were from within and outside the local community project site.
5.4.2 Barriers to Participation

The findings of this study revealed significant barriers, deeply rooted in the local context, to participation in the three development projects. Although diverse, these barriers can be grouped under the following main headings: socio-economic situation, culture and history, geography, organisational procedures, group dynamics, and local structures (see Figure: 18). These barriers did not operate in isolation but were intertwined and mutually reinforcing; likewise, barriers were neither uniform and static but rather specific to each individual and able to change over the project’s lifetime. As previously stated the term ‘participation’ is inherently ambiguous; therefore, the barriers to the dominant or ‘Mongolian’ interpretation of participation as found in this study will be dealt with separately from the higher-levels of participation (found in the literature and Project C). However, this study found that the barriers to the ‘Mongolian’ interpretation of participation remained, to even a larger degree, barriers to higher-levels of participation.

**Figure 18: Barriers to ‘Mongolian’ and Higher-Level Participation**

![Diagram showing the barriers to participation](image)

Socio-economic Situation: Primacy of tangible benefits, *belen setgel*ay, poverty, personal lives, gender

Local Structures: Mistrust of government, prevalence of nepotism and corruption, local registration, centralised governance systems

Culture and History: *Belen setgel*ay, mistrust, traditions of livestock herding, relationship, shame/shyness, social differentiation, authoritarianism, top-down leadership

Group Dynamics: Groups as the unit of participation, free riders, geography, mistrust, group size

Geography: Distance, climate, environmental degradation

Organisational Procedures: Staff, methods, selection criteria

Note: The barriers to participation are mutually reinforcing, hence many of the barriers, e.g. primacy of material benefits, could be placed in a number of categories.
5.4.2.1 Barriers to ‘Mongolian’ Participation

The dominant or ‘Mongolian’ interpretation of participation in the case studies was “contributions of group labour and information for material benefits, within a top-down authoritarian structure (including local institutions).” Although this interpretation is both a reflection of the DOs’ objectives and procedures and contemporary Mongolian society, major obstacles to participation were still present. Before outlining the main obstacles to accessing, remaining in, and fully participating in projects, several key points must be recognised. At the most foundational level, the main obstacle preventing people from participation was the lack of opportunity to do so; this could be intentional, i.e. they were not in the target group or not selected, or unintentional, i.e. they never received information about the project. Secondly, participation may or may not involve the choice to participate. For those with the choice to participate the absence of incentives then becomes a major barrier; for example, a lack of relationship with staff may cause participants to decrease their degree of effort in a project.

Socio-Economic Barriers

In this study the primacy of tangible benefits were a central theme in interpretations of participation and participation’s benefits and were the underlying motivation for local peoples’ participation choices. Unsurprisingly then, when the projects’ tangible benefits failed to measure up to the expectations or needs of local people, they neither joined nor remained in the projects. Interviewees reported that, in Mongolian culture, an expectation exists that development projects would, and should, ‘gift’ or ‘hand out’ material resources for little or no recipient effort. This expectation, described as belen setgeltay, was linked to the Communist era of social welfare and state employment, and recent times where DOs have focused on short-term aid projects. Meanwhile, even when people conceptualised participation as employment and therefore expected to contribute some effort for tangible benefits, participation in the projects was discarded if other livelihood strategies proved more attractive. Furthermore, the poor needed and desired immediate material benefits in exchange for their participation. These people were typically engaged in day-to-day subsistence living, and therefore required manifest and sequential material rewards when the costs of participation impinged on their ability to provide for their basic needs. Hence, latent material benefits which required large investments (time, energy, etc.) from participants before they were actualised proved a significant barrier.

111 This could be for any number of economic, cultural, or social reasons.
Poverty also inhibited local participation in the projects. The poverty apparent in the case studies was contextual and multidimensional (Narayan et al., 2000), and comprised resource, mental, social, and physical poverty. Firstly, local people often lacked the financial and capital resources needed to ‘buy’ into these projects that required local contributions, such as blocks for greenhouses, tools for mining, and fencing for vegetable fields. Moreover, even when participant contributions were not overtly demanded, resource capital was still essential for participation, as projects carried inherent costs for participants, such as transport, time away from other livelihoods, etc. Secondly, mental poverty was a restriction and described as a limited capacity to grasp concepts, a lack of organisational skills, and illiteracy/innumeracy\textsuperscript{112}. Mental poverty inhibited peoples’ involvement in seminars, workshops, etc., and especially impinged on activities which had a strong business focus. Thirdly, social poverty or a lack of social capital restricted participation and was manifest in a small or ineffective \textit{tandag humuu}s network. Due to the importance of social connections in Mongolian society, those with weak \textit{tandag humuu}s networks were less likely to be selected for projects and more likely to be a member of weak project groups. Furthermore, the shocks and risks associated with a new livelihood (especially one with latent benefits) could not be absorbed by those with ineffective \textit{tandag humuu}s networks. Lastly, physical poverty limited the ability of the elderly, the weak and disabled, children, and women from participating in the more physically taxing activities, such as vegetable growing. However, this last limitation was identified as ‘Mongolian laziness’ by some interviewees, who suggested Mongolians are just not willing to work hard because of experiences under Socialism and as a result of the independent, less physical nature of the livelihood mainstay - livestock herding.

In accordance with development writers who have noted that local people only partly engage in a project and lead full, complex lives outside its confines, the personal lives of participants proved an obstacle to participation (Cleaver, 1999). In the context of rural Mongolia, illness, poverty, and seasonal labour shortages all affected participation. Moreover, because of the ‘nomadic’ or ‘transient’ nature of Mongolians (Stewart, 2000), and the strength, complexity, and breadth of \textit{tandag humuu}s networks, participants were also likely to leave the projects when the circumstances of kith and kin demanded so. In addition, like all people, Mongolians have various personalities, and hence different attitudes, values, and behaviours which will play a part in determining participation choices.

\textsuperscript{112} Although reported literacy levels are high, 97.8 % (2005) these figures are misleading and fail to show any regional and social disparities, and more importantly the higher numbers of pragmatically illiterate Mongolians (Yembuu & Munkh-Erdene, 2006).
Issues of gender, and more specifically, the equality, equity, and rights of women have a principle role in development thinking. It is widely noted that women often face significant and socially entrenched barriers to participation within development projects (Oakley, 1991; Guijt & Shah, 1998). Since the democratic transition in Mongolia, women have borne the brunt of increasing poverty and faced deepening social and economic inequalities (ADB, 2005), often shoulder the main household reproductive and productive responsibilities (Rossabi, 2005), and face gender-based obstacles to career advancement and participation in civil society and development initiatives (Rossabi, 2005; Ykhanbai & Bulgan, 2006).

Although this study did not reveal any obvious gender obstacles to participation, some potential barriers still emerged. Firstly, throughout the three projects, positions of authority (DOs’ management staff, local field leaders, and group/cooperative leaders) were predominantly, but not exclusively, filled by males. This is congruent with current Mongolian society, where, as Rossabi (2005) suggests and interviewees noted, although Mongolian women are generally more educated than men, and fill larger portions of many professional occupations, they often fail to reach the top-level positions and are thus confined to middle-management. Secondly, staff noted that women made up the majority of participants in the projects’ activities. However, as the basic unit of participation was the household and therefore project membership was flexible and revolving, the opportunity existed for men to still monopolise any decision-making processes and benefits while women’s workloads increased.

Culture and History
Even though the dominant interpretation of participation evident in this study arose from Mongolian society and values, cultural and historical factors still obstructed participation choices and the quality of peoples’ participation. Interestingly, it was the DO staff and CIs who predominantly reported these barriers, perhaps because for participants culture was not an abstract concept but an invisible, indistinguishable reality.

Interviewees suggested that mistrust, the traditions of livestock herding, and relationship could negatively influence people’s participation choices. Firstly, the high presence of mistrust in Mongolian society was described as a cultural phenomenon taking three distinct forms: interpersonal mistrust – linked to rising individualism in the ‘age of the market’ and the taamin togoo phenomenon; governmental mistrust – due to the weak state post-socialism,

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113 Statistics show that 62 percent of high-school graduates, and 70.7 percent of students in higher education are female (Rossabi, 2005).
and the corruption and nepotism evident; and lastly, development mistrust – a mistrust of foreign development initiatives. While the first two forms of mistrust have been reported (Upton, 2008a), ‘development’ mistrust is a new phenomenon having arisen from a legacy of inappropriate projects that failed to deliver on promises of material benefits to local people, and a view that much development money has been siphoned off by staff and government officials (Rossabi, 2005). Secondly, livestock herding is the epicentre of Mongolian culture from which the other spheres of rural life originate and rotate (Goldstein & Bealle, 1994; Lassieur, 2007). Hence, when the projects’ activities proved inharmonious with livestock herding, non-participation or partial participation was adopted by some. For example, in Project B, a number of participants had forgone growing non-traditional foods in favour of those compatible to herding, and had left the project when the stationary requirements of vegetable growing interfered with the mobility needed for herding. Additionally, interviewees reported that many herders were cautious of the projects’ new livelihoods strategies and as a result adopted a wait-and-see approach. Such a risk-averse nature has been previously reported as a barrier to collective action and linked to traditions of transhumant livestock herding, which have been specifically tailored to Mongolia’s unique conditions (Campi, 1996; Ykhanbai & Bulgan, 2006; Upton, 2008a). Thus, herders are reluctant to alter or diverge from a livelihood which has proven itself over the centuries to be a trustworthy survival mechanism. Lastly, relationship is highly valued in Mongolian culture, and in line with ‘collectivist’ values, personal relationships form the base of many decisions (Triandis, 2000) and hence, poor relationships negatively affected participation choices (see Section: 5.4.1.2).

Information extraction was a defining feature of the projects’ ‘participatory’ approach, occurring through group meetings and stakeholder workshops (staff, local people, government officials). The quality of this information, i.e. whether it accurately represented peoples’ opinions, was limited by various features of Mongolian culture. Staff often reported that herders were ‘shameful’ or ‘shy’ due to their isolation and had difficulty talking openly and expressing themselves to strangers, while it is suggested that shyness increases with gatherings of over 30 people. In addition, because of the social differentiation in Mongolian society it was reported that local people (those at the lower end of society) would be reluctant to voice a differing opinion to what they perceived would be acceptable to those who had more power, like staff, government officials, or the wealthy. Such a description ties in with Hofstede’s description of a ‘high power distance’ culture where authoritarian structures are normative and respected, and it is inappropriate to directly or openly criticise those in power (1991). Moreover, poverty and a dependency on outside assistance meant that local people
needed and expected material benefits from projects and may therefore provide false information to ensure this happened. Thus, information-gathering spaces where societal power gaps were inherent in the local community and/or relationships had not been built meant Habermas’s notion of an ‘ideal speech situation’ could not be approached and the equality of participatory processes were negatively affected (Kothari, 2001; Kapoor, 2002). Meanwhile, authoritarian values were also seen as a barrier, not because it restricted decision-making, but because it meant leaders had to be present to ensure participants were ‘active’ or idekhtie, i.e. ‘laboured hard’.

Geography
Geographical barriers to participation in Mongolian rural development projects have been reported anecdotally by Upton (2008a), Ykhanbai and Bulgan (2006), and Schmidt (2006a). This study’s results builds on the work of these authors by showing the geographical isolation of rural Mongolians to be one of the principal barriers to participation. Because of Mongolia’s small rural population, vast countryside, and transhumant livestock practices, many rural households live significant distances from one another and from sum/aimag centres, and maintain only a temporary place of residence. Such a context, combined with harsh climatic variables and poor communication/transport infrastructure, greatly limited local peoples’ ability to initially access, and then routinely attend, the projects’ activities. This was further compounded by activities, such as meetings, workshops, and group work typically being in sum and/or aimag centres, which meant the more isolated and poor participants (because of transport costs, labour shortages, etc.) were further inhibited. Furthermore, it became apparent that geography had a reinforcing or foundational role in a number of other barriers divulged in this study. For example, information shortages, poverty, shyness, free-riding, mistrust, and top-down management are all, to varying degrees, rooted in or associated with Mongolia’s geographical landscape.

Environmental concerns were also seen to threaten the overall viability and sustainability of the projects’ activities, and hence the participation of local people. The global crisis of climate change has manifested itself in a progressively warmer and drier Mongolian climate and the subsequent loss of wells, rivers, and lakes (Batima, 2006). Further adding to climate-derived losses of pastureland and water sources has been the recent increase of livestock numbers, loss of traditional livestock practices, and cut-backs to livestock services, such as well maintenance (Mearns, 2004a, 2004b). All three projects’ activities required a sustainable water source. For example, to grow large quantities of vegetables in Mongolia’s short
seasonal window, high volumes of water at specific times are essential. The warming of Mongolia’s climate is not observed only in scientific circles, however, as during the researcher’s visits to Mongolia, rural people often commented on the visible loss of pastureland and water sources. Hence, a number of interviewees, both staff and participants, expressed great concern over water issues\(^{114}\), especially given the delay of late spring/early summer rains at the time of the research.

**Organisational Procedures**

As key actors in the development projects it is unsurprising that the DOs themselves became obstacles to local participation, a fact to which numerous other studies have drawn attention (see Nelson & Wright, 1995; Cooke & Kothari, 2001). While the DO’s theory of participation and empowerment proved an impediment in Project C (see Section: 5.2.6), across the three case studies more practical barriers were also evident, including staff, methods, and the selection criteria.

Local staff held a pivotal role in the projects as their relationships with local people could motivate or hinder participation. In this regard, a high turnover of staff, staff that adopted a *darag*-like demeanour\(^{115}\), and staff that spent little time at the project site, especially in an informal capacity, proved detrimental to the forming of relationships. The methods the DOs employed also restricted participation. Just as widespread, detailed, positive information, and rurally appropriate, pragmatic, friendly workshops and seminars motivated people to participate (see Section: 5.4.1.2), the opposite was also true. For example, workshops and seminars that were delivered in a centralised meeting place (e.g. aimag centre), were spontaneous and clinical rather than hospitable, and were delivered by experts that had poor relationships with participants all hindered local participation. Central to this barrier was the lack of time the DOs’ staff spent interacting with local people, this was coined ‘the brief rural visit phenomenon’ by Chambers (1984, p. 10) who suggested it led to DOs gaining a false picture of the realities of rural life.

As principal agents in the projects, the DOs defined a target population and designed participant selection criteria. The underlying aim of all three projects was to reduce rural poverty; hence the selection of lower-income or ‘poor’ households was prioritised. However,

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\(^{114}\) Some vegetable groups observed had delayed planting due to water shortages.

\(^{115}\) *Darag* translates as ‘boss’. *Darag* carries a negative connotation of a ‘boss’ who gives orders to local people and is seen as knowing what is best for people without listening to them.
in Projects A and B, to ensure the success and sustainability of their activities, the DOs made sure groups would not solely consist of ‘poor’ households and purposefully excluded the ‘poorest of the poor’ or nen yadoo. Staff understood that the poor’s lack of financial/capital, social, and mental resources entrenched them in a poverty cycle and would therefore restrict their ability to fully engage in project activities. Meanwhile, a sentiment amongst interviewees existed that the poor were ‘lazy’, and ‘irresponsible’ and this would further jeopardise the success of groups and cooperatives. As a result, the nen yadoo were actively excluded and selection priority given to the ‘poor - but capable’ (i.e. those who had some resources on which the project could build). In addition, some middle income and/or ‘rich’ households, i.e. those with resources or capacity (social connections, wealth, experience, etc.) were selected, as these members could use their resources to increase the group’s productivity and sustain it through any shocks. Thus, for these projects to benefit the ‘poor’ the nen yadoo had to be excluded and the non-poor included. Furthermore, because the DOs worked within local government agencies to select participants, those people not registered in the local aimag, a relatively expensive process, were also excluded.

**Group Dynamics**

Groups, the basic unit of participation in all three case studies, contained typical, yet contextually based, barriers to participation. Firstly, the emphasis on group work inhibited people from joining the project. Whilst work groups are congruent to the Mongolian culture of ‘group-think’ and are historically based, for the more independent or ‘individualistic’ local people, those with bad experiences of previous collective-based initiatives (like the khorshoo and kompan), and the wealthy (finance, capital, social connections), participation in a group was a disincentive. Moreover, the emphasis on groups also restricted the poor from accessing the project, as they lacked the social capital to form their own group, or the resources (social, mental, physical, and capital) which would motivate others to include them in their groups.

Secondly, once groups were formed, free-rider behaviour, distance, group size, and mistrust all threatened the quality and continuation of participation. Free-rider behaviour is widely reported in economic and development writings as an ingrained problem to groups or collective action (Ostrom, 1990; Shepherd, 1991; Brett, 1996). Free-rider problems occur when individuals cannot be excluded from the benefits that group membership provides, even when they do not proportionately contribute to the group effort but ‘free ride’ on the efforts of others (Ostrom, 1990). In the three case studies participants reported that free riding, called ‘tuulachlakh’, in work groups was commonplace, especially in regards to labour effort, as
some members worked harder, longer hours, and more frequently than others but failed to receive benefits in proportion to their effort. While free-riders are seen as inherent to group work, this study found that this problem was exacerbated in groups whose main activity is strenuous physical labour, groups where people are less well known to each other, and group activities where local staff or local leaders are absent. Interestingly, local people interviewed seemed divided as to how to deal with the problems. On one ‘economic’ hand, people felt that group benefits should be divided amongst its members by the leader according to the work effort of individuals. While on the other ‘social’ hand, the Mongolian culture of ‘group think’, generosity, hospitality, and _tandag humuus_ networks, and a history of state provision, meant people also felt that members should still receive a stake in the group’s benefits, disproportionate to their effort. It seemed that this lack of clarity over free-rider problems had the potential to derail the activities of any one of the groups seen in this study, especially when the DOs exited and with it went the groups’ external authoritarian structure.

Problems of distance, group size, and mistrust were interwoven and worked together to threaten the effectiveness of groups. Firstly, distance, combined with poor communication infrastructure, not only made the coordination of group activities problematic, but also affected the composition of groups. Understandably, participants wanted to join a group with others in their _tandag humuus_ network; however, geographic barriers restricted people to forming groups with those closest to them, people whom they did not necessarily know well, get along with, or trust. From the case studies it appeared that when groups were formed quickly and externally, without a lengthy period of interactions (workshops, seminars, etc) which built trust, social capital, and knowledge of member characteristics, they were more likely to break up, perform poorly, and distribute benefits inequitably. Lastly, as Upton (2008a) reported, group size was also a hindrance, with groups greater than eight households less likely to succeed, as higher group numbers further exacerbated problems of coordination, free-rider behaviour, and mistrust. These factors outweighed the skill diversity that can be achieved by a larger group size, as it would appear in rural Mongolia that the individual skill set is not greatly diverse116.

5.4.2.2 Barriers to Higher-Levels of Participation
This study found that significant and pervasive barriers to higher levels of participation existed in the case study projects. To reiterate, participation is considered to be ‘higher-level’

116 The prominence of livestock herding in rural Mongolia means rural dwellers have a similar skill set.
(HL) and empowering when local people have a lead, controlling role in the project’s stages (identification, analysis, planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation), and make key decisions independently (Pretty, 1995; Chambers, 1997). However, within the practical realities of the case study projects, participation bore very little resemblance to this idealised form. This was not only due to the DOs’ interpretation of participation and subsequent methodologies, but also because notions of HL participation are set polar to deeply rooted aspects of Mongolian culture, and are heavily obstructed by Mongolia’s local context (social, political, economic, and geographic). This finding is supportive of the extensive body of development literature which has highlighted substantial obstacles to HL participation (Oakley, 1991; Cook & Kothari, 2001) and pointed out that these obstacles are set within the local culture and context (Cleaver, 1999; Hailey, 2004). Furthermore this study provides a different perspective from that of the case studies of Schmidt (2006a), Ykhanbai and Bulgan (2006), and Upton (2008a), that documented the successes of HL participatory techniques for the collective action of Mongolian herders regarding pastureland management.

In the case study projects the primary barrier to HL participation was that the main stakeholders’ interpretation of participation did not correlate with HL participatory concepts. For DOs and local people, participation meant “contributions of group labour and information for material benefits, within a top-down authoritarian structure (including local institutions)” (See Section: 5.2). This interpretation was adopted by the DOs because it enabled the delivery of a targeted, time-bound, ‘successful’ (in terms of measurable results) project and because it was in line with the DOs’ top-down, result-based organisational culture (Craig & Porter, 1997). Likewise, local people also subscribed to this interpretation, partly because their involvement in the projects demanded it, but primarily because it was congruent with Mongolian culture and local circumstances (poverty, distance, etc.). Simply stated therefore, HL participation was obstructed by the fact it was undesirable for the main actors in the case study projects.

From the findings of this study it also appears that the barriers to lower-levels of participation in Mongolia are also, to an even greater extent, obstacles to HL participation. In contrast to Projects A and B, Project C based its project upon HL participatory ideals. However, in Project C a lack of economic and social incentives for participation existed, as did significant barriers to even lower-level participation, such as material benefits, training and seminars, relationship with staff, and information shortages. Thus, it appears that the barriers to lower-levels of participation will still remain barriers to HL participation and exert a much larger
inhibitory force. For example, if relationship is important in securing the participation of Mongolians in a project with clearly-stated guarantees of material benefits, it will be even more crucial in a project where the material rewards for participation are less clear and latent.

**Barriers to HL Participation Apparent in Mongolian Culture and Local Context**

Over and above the barriers already mentioned, evidence from the case studies and CI interviews suggests that defining elements of Mongolian culture and the local context run contrary to fundamental ideals of HL participation. HL participation has been described with terms like ‘bottom-up planning’, ‘grass roots initiatives’, ‘decentralised decision-making’, ‘evolving goals’, and ‘diverse outputs’ (Chambers, 1997). However, these ideals do not readily fit with the motivational factors for participation in development projects found in this study, nor do these ideals easily mesh with Mongolian cultural and historical norms of authoritarian leadership.

A number of the foundational elements of HL participation ran in contrast to key incentives for participation revealed in this study. Firstly, Chambers (1997) describes a shift in power from ‘uppers’, such as the DO and its staff, to ‘lowers’, like local people, as integral to HL participation. However, in this study one of the incentives for joining the project was that local people perceived the DO and its staff to hold sufficient power (resources, knowledge, social capital, organisational skills, leadership) to deliver tangible benefits. Thus, it was not the transference of decision-making power that motivated people, but the ‘borrowing’ of power\(^\text{117}\), since for local people the DOs became a powerful member of their *tandag humuus* networks and remained so only over the project’s lifetime. Secondly, HL participatory projects are said to bring evolving and diverse benefits to local people. Nevertheless, in this study local people joined the projects because they clearly understood the nature and timeframe of the expected benefits, as well as the costs of their participation. In this sense, rural Mongolian people desired ‘blue-print’ projects, instead of ‘process’ or ‘participatory’ projects given their circumstances of poverty, past experiences, and short-term orientations.

Inherent to HL participation is the idea of iterative participatory workshops, where an open dialogue between the various stakeholders occurs to identify needs, prioritise problems, and select potential solutions. While a number of cultural factors would greatly inhibit the equality of stakeholder participation in such group discussions (see Section: 5.4.2.1), the techniques of

\(^{117}\) As one CI suggested power is considered zero-sum in Mongolia.
PRA may also prove a hindrance for some Mongolians. Many of the PRA techniques such as timelines, problem trees, etc., are based on western-style critical analysis. This emphasis on cause and effect logic was seen by interviewees as prohibiting participation for those who had little experience with concepts of theoretical problem-solving, sustainability, future-thinking, and profit, and were influenced by short-term outlooks and a generalised sense of fatalism. Meanwhile, for participatory stakeholder workshops to act as a space for true, open dialogue, information needs to be freely shared amongst those present. However, it was reported that it is normal practice in Mongolian society for those in power not to share information with those people below them, who in turn did not expect and therefore demand information or accountability.

At the heart of HL participation is ‘local’ decision-making, whereby those normally excluded from decision-making processes are able to determine, or at least strongly influence, the goals, outcomes, and/or activities of the project (Chambers, 1997). However, bottom-up decision-making is not easily integrated into Mongolian cultural norms of authoritarianism, where decisions are made by the most powerful. In Mongolia, the power to lead is derived from wealth, social connections, family ties, education, position, and charisma, while a powerful leader is highly valuable in the hierarchical society because of their ability to better position the group against other powerful forces, like the local government. The Mongolian top-down style of leadership runs counter to HL notions of ‘facilitation’ where leaders (staff or local people) facilitate the decision-making process which occurs through robust debate, analysis, an equal opportunity to speak, and majority consensus. As CIs reported, in Mongolia it is normal practice for leaders to make decisions alone, without extensive consultation and discussion, and for these decisions to remain unquestioned or unchallenged by subordinates. Meanwhile, when debates around decisions occur, it was reported that Mongolians will automatically align their opinion to perceptions of the group’s will - which is the will of the powerful leader. For example, while voting over decisions occurred in some of the projects’ groups, CIs suggested that because of this ingrained ‘group’ and ‘leadership’ mentality voting would be done according to the leader’s will, whether or not it was overtly expressed. Furthermore, it was reported that leaders are unlikely to be elected democratically, but would rather assume leadership based on their power and the social order which is ingrained in local peoples’ consciousness.

118 The formal education system in Mongolia since its inception in the Communist era is based upon rote learning, rather than the more Western interactive learning style.
While bottom-up, participatory decision-making is conceived of as an immutable moral good by many Western writers (Mckinnon, 2006), top-down decision making is an intrinsic feature of Mongolia culture, and not seen as ‘wrong’, but rather the necessary and natural way to do things (Sneath, 1999). It held a predominant place in Mongolia’s nascent history (Sneath, 1999), the recent era of Communism (Campi, 1996), and the current political climate (Mearns, 2004b), and according to CIs is ever present in contemporary society, such as schools, households, companies, and government departments. Thus, the emancipation goals of the proponents of HL participation would require Mongolian rural people to be freed from their cultural values. Thus the process of HL participation becomes paradoxical, as Mongolians are given the right to control the project in order to ensure activities are locally-based, a process which in itself runs counter clockwise to normative Mongolian societal values and behaviours.

In this study it became evident that while authoritarian leadership is normative, it is the quality of this leadership which greatly concerns Mongolians. Interviewees often talked negatively about the darag or boss mentality, describing a leader who thinks he always knows what is best for people without talking with them, taking their opinions on board, or having a relationship with them. Meanwhile, interviewees praised a strong leader, seen as someone who is unwavering, who brings results, who has a heart for the people, and who makes decisions based on relationship and listening. In this regard, CIs suggested that a shift to a ‘democratic’ style of leadership was slowly taking place in Mongolia society. However, it seemed that this ‘democratic’ style was less about majority consensus, and more about leaders listening to people’s opinions and ideas, and being open and accountable for their actions. Similarly, Sabloff’s research into Mongolian understandings of democratic governance found that Mongolians were more concerned with the transparency of the government, than a government ‘for’, ‘of’ or ‘by’ the people (2001). Moreover, Hailey (2001) suggests that in ‘collectivist’ or ‘high power distance’ cultures it is the strong personal relationships between leaders and community members rather than participatory technologies, such as PRA-style workshops, which bring success in projects, as this is the culturally appropriate way of decision-making and planning. Thus, in Mongolia a good leader, who leads and makes decisions on the basis of relationship, power, and listening, is more valued than a drawn-out, participatory process of consensus-building connected with HL participation.

The ultimate goal of HL participation is for local people to undertake ‘development’ independently; that may mean working outside traditional development mechanisms, or
within them while still retaining control (Oakley, 1991). This goal, however, is at odds with the Mongolian culture and context where, according to interviewees, there exists a deeply entrenched ‘dependent spirit’ described as belen setgeltay. For example interviewees commented:

*People here have a belen setgeltay; they are used to things being done for them. They are dependent, like the Russian times - when we had Socialism and we were under that society for seventy years so that thought is still in people’s minds.... People always look to the government and people in control and ask them ‘what should we do?’*

*Since 1999 projects have begun to be implemented in my country. The people are looking towards foreign peoples’ hand. If someone tells them to do it - they will do it. The idea ‘I have to do it’ is in people’s mind but they can’t move their own hands. We [the project] tell the people ‘you can do it’, so they start to do it. In general Mongolian people are all waiting for outside people’s mouths to move them.*

This reflects Oakley’s description of a ‘social obstacle’ to participation, as Oakley writes, “probably the most frequent and powerful obstacle to participation of rural people in development projects is a mentality of dependence which is deeply and historically engrained in their lives” (1991, p. 12). As the above quotations illustrate, this ‘mentality of dependence’ in Mongolia appears to have arisen from a number of historical sources. Firstly, the pre-Communist era was dominated by all powerful rulers, such as Chinggis Khan, Manchu administrators, and Mongolian nobility. Secondly, the Communist era, which was dominated by central planning, and dependence on the Nam (‘Party’) for jobs, social services, and daily motivation, and where independent or entrepreneurial thinking or action by the masses, was discouraged, outlawed and punished. Thirdly, the recent abundance of ‘relief’ projects, has meant Mongolians expect outside agencies to provide handouts, rather than looking inwardly to take on development initiatives themselves. In this regard, rural Mongolians may have become accustomed to leaving decisions and initiatives to their leaders and outside agencies, with the subsequent lack of rural leadership and organisational skills, as well as inexperience in running community organisations or projects (Oakley, 1991). Meanwhile, the disincentives for independent development remain high as local people, primarily consumed with day-to-day survival, do not have sufficient time, skills, energy, social connections, information, status etc., to engage in autonomous development initiatives either within or outside traditional development mechanisms. Thus, it seems that for rural Mongolians it is not only normative but also highly desirable for development help to come prefabricated from an
external source. Therefore in contrast to Chambers’ ideal notion of participatory development: “‘we’ participate in ‘their’ project” (1997, p. 30), for Mongolians, development equates to: ‘we’ (rural Mongolians) participating in ‘their’ (outside agencies’) projects.

5.5 Constraints and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study has strived to capture a holistic picture of ‘participation’ in Mongolian rural development projects, there will of course be factors which have been left unconsidered. Hence, this section will attempt to highlight the constraints of this study and make suggestions for future research.

5.5.1 Constraints of this Study

This study aimed to capture a diverse, yet in-depth picture of participation in Mongolian rural development projects; however the findings were constrained by its chosen methodology, cross-cultural nature, and field-level practicalities. Firstly, in order to achieve its aims this research’s methodology was comprised of case studies on three different rural development projects. While these projects shared a common set of properties, their differences hindered the research’s ability to extract common themes. Moreover, because a case study approach was undertaken this research’s findings are fixed to a certain time, place, and context and therefore can only serve to highlight potential challenges and opportunities for other rural development projects in Mongolia and similar countries. Secondly, as this study is cross-cultural in nature the researcher’s New Zealand world-view and power will shape the data which is collected and the manner in which is interpreted. Thirdly, limited time and resources, and the inherent transport and communication difficulties of Mongolia, limited the number, length and type of interviews conducted. Although, it would have been practically impossible to interview all the projects’ stakeholders, the research would have benefitted from an increased number of interviews with people who had ceased participating in the projects. In a similar vein, follow-up interviews with development staff would have proved beneficial by providing further opportunity to triangulate data and elicit a deeper understanding of why certain interpretations of participation existed.

5.5.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Arising from this study’s findings it is suggested that future research into Mongolian development initiatives should include:
1. Further research into the influences of culture and history on the manner in which Mongolians engage with development initiatives. In recent times anthropological studies in Mongolia have typically focused on shamanism or ethnic minority groups in the Northern regions of the country. Meanwhile, in this study it was suggested that Mongolian culture is in a period of transition where ‘socialist’ attitudes, behaviours, and values are being replaced by ‘Western’ cultural orientations. Future research is warranted to not only shed light on the changing culture but to explore how Mongolians’ perceptions of development change accordingly, for example: does this socio-cultural change mean Mongolian development priorities will shift from group to individual outcomes, or from economic rewards to political influence?

2. In-depth, longitudinal case studies of Mongolian development initiatives. While this study provided useful insights, they were obtained through a ‘snapshot’ approach. Hence a longitudinal analysis will provide a fuller, dynamic understanding into the economic, social, political, and cultural reasons that motivate and restrict participation, and also the longer-term impacts of development initiatives. Such analysis should focus on the different types of ‘participatory’ projects, and should include factors which motivate and restrict both lower- and higher-level participation.

3. Future research into project ‘groups’ (i.e. work groups, NGOs, cooperatives) in Mongolia. Interviewees in this study highlighted the potential of groups as a vehicle for economic development and socio-political action in Mongolia. Again, this study only tentatively explored project groups, and was unable to provide detailed insights into their composition or evolution over time. Therefore, further research is warranted to examine: the ability of groups to evolve from economic to socio-political vehicles; the sustainability of groups post-project; the ability of groups to minimise free-riding; and the internal equality of groups (decision-making, benefits, etc.).
Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction
This study explored the concept of ‘participation’ in Mongolian rural development projects. Through the literature review it was shown that, although participation has an eminent place in development’s discourse, it is an ambiguous concept – containing a wide-range of interpretations and practical manifestations with associated quandaries. Additionally, the literature review presented an overview of Mongolian history, current context, and culture, illustrating the uniqueness and subtleties of the context in which Mongolian rural development projects operate. While a number of ethnographic case studies have investigated ‘participation’ in rural development projects, fewer have researched the benefits and influencing factors associated with participation, and as yet none have focused their attention on Mongolia – a large recipient of foreign aid. This study’s central question was: How do stakeholders in Mongolian rural development projects interpret the concept of ‘participation’? This was explored through the framework of three sub-questions:
   i) How do the stakeholders understand participation, including practical, theoretical, and linguistic elements?
   ii) What do stakeholders perceive as the benefits of participation and which benefits are prioritised?
   iii) Which factors influence participation, including motivations and barriers to participation?

These questions were answered through field-based case studies of three ‘participatory’ Mongolian rural development projects. Through the analysis and discussion of these results, themes emerged which answered the research questions and provided an ethnographic snapshot of participation in Mongolian rural development projects. This final chapter of the thesis summarises the main findings of the research and provides implications for development projects in Mongolia and for development more generally.

6.2 Summary of Main Findings
With respect to the first question, a dominant understanding of ‘participation’ (ohrulzokh or hamrakh) in Mongolian rural development projects emerged across the stakeholders: Participation is local contributions of group labour and information for material benefits, within a top-down authoritarian structure (including local institutions). Each element of this understanding arises from the Development Organisation’s (DO) structure and objectives, and
corresponds to the Mongolian participants’ conceptualisation of the project as a normative livelihood strategy or ‘employment’. Groups become the basic unit of participation because they enable larger inputs, bring about more efficient and sustainable activities, are congruent to Mongolia’s ‘group think’, and contain aspects of Mongolia’s historical (suur) and traditional (khot ail) group. In this regard groups were typically based on kith and kin relationships, contained two to eight households, operated with a defined internal leadership structure, and had an external catalyst, facilitator, and monitor. Participation also involves ‘local contributions of labour and information’ which is seen by Mongolian participants as their employment duties or ‘idekhtie ohrulzokh’, and enables the DOs to deliver a more targeted, efficient, sustainable project. Meanwhile, as ‘employees’, Mongolian participants expect material benefits to be their wage for participating in a ‘development’ project where the implementing organisations have prioritised and promised tangible results. In this regard, development staff understand that material benefits are most effectively delivered through a top-down authoritarian structure which controls the decision-making process, selects ‘appropriate’ participants, maintains a hierarchical staffing structure, and provides ‘all things’. This structure is well-suited to Mongolia’s context of powerful bureaucracies, logistical difficulties, etc., and is the normative organisational structure for rural Mongolians. Lastly, local institutions are included in the understanding of participation because they are the central seat of power in rural regions, and thus their involvement is needed to access local information, to secure operating permission, land, and other government services, and to give sustainability and a sense of ‘normality’ to the project’s activities.

While a dominant understanding of participation was present in this study, the management staff in one of the case study projects described local participation as: *The increased ability of Mongolian participants to engage in the decision-making processes which affect their lives.* This understanding stemmed from the DO’s policy focus on ‘empowerment’ and the recent shift to a more ‘bottom-up’ approach based on the advice of development consultants. Moreover, management staff understood that in a ‘participatory’ project, activities would be solely based on the Mongolian participants’ initiatives and resources, and the project should provide ‘software’ (knowledge and workshops) but no ‘hardware’ (material resources). The different stakeholder understandings of participation in this project resulted in a number of empowerment quandaries and substantive barriers to participation.

With regards to the second question, this study indicated that the tangible benefits of participation have primacy over the intangible in Mongolian rural development projects.
Tangible benefits are prioritised by both development staff and Mongolian participants but in divergent forms. Development staff prioritise the longer-term tangible benefits (i.e. food security and income) given the DOs’ goals of sustainable improvements to livelihoods. In order to ensure the sustainability of these tangible benefits, sub-benefits are provided sequentially: firstly mental capital (knowledge and skills), then physical capital (finance, materials), while social capital (social connections) is not planned but occurs naturally within the project’s activities. In contrast, Mongolian participants have a more immediate orientation prioritising the tangible benefits which are manifest at the given time. This means that upon entering the project, Mongolian participants prioritise the material resources gifted to them, and then later the material outcomes of the new livelihoods. Meanwhile, in this study, notions of empowerment were directly linked to tangible benefits rather than intangibles by the majority of stakeholders.

While development staff envision intangible benefits of participation as important in their own right, for Mongolian participants they are a gateway to, a derivative of, or closely linked to the project’s tangible outputs. Four prominent intangible benefits of participation emerged from this study: knowledge/mental investment, ‘power within’, social connections, and groups, each with unique features which make them valuable within the Mongolian context. Firstly, knowledge is seen as a benefit when it is pragmatic, skill-building knowledge which can be used as a livelihood strategy. Secondly, ‘power within’ is the internal feelings of self-confidence, self-esteem, and hope, which have visible expression as rural Mongolians grow in their ability to speak freely and openly, and start to make plans for future enterprises. Thirdly, improved social connections, or ‘social capital’ arise from participation and are linked to an expansion or strengthening of rural Mongolians’ networks of social obligation (tandag humuus). This study indicated that social capital between Mongolian participants can be built around shared time together in the project’s formal activities and informal gatherings, rather than solely through participatory workshops. The increase in social capital is closely linked to the benefits of ‘groups’, which act not only as a mechanism to increase material benefits but also fill a social void in rural Mongolia by providing participants with a space and reason to enjoy one another’s company and assistance during the social rituals of daily living.

Concerning the influences on participation, this study revealed a complex, diverse set of factors motivate and inhibit participation in Mongolian rural development projects and these are a reflection of the DOs’ goals and methods, and the unique context of rural Mongolia. Of the motivational factors it appeared that economic rationality is the foundational incentive for
participation. In this study, rural Mongolians joined, remained, or increased their efforts in the development projects when the economic benefits outweighed the associated costs. These economic benefits and costs are unique to each participant and are strongly influenced by the rural context which includes poverty, limited income-generating livelihoods, family splitting, and traditions of livestock herding. Once the economic reasons for participating in the project are sufficient, social motivations gain more influence. In this study the social motivations included: widespread, detailed, and positive information about the project/DO; the perceived power, leadership, and organisational skills of the development organisation; a deep personal relationship between development staff and local people; and rurally oriented workshops and seminars. Finally, this study indicated that, in rural Mongolia, only when economic and social motivations have proven satisfactory will polity incentives, i.e. the incentive to influence decision-making processes, attract people to participate in development projects.

This study found significant barriers to participating in Mongolian rural development projects; moreover, these barriers are mutually reinforcing, dynamic, and often deeply ingrained elements of Mongolian culture and context. Although diverse, barriers to ‘Mongolian’ participation can be grouped under the following themes: a lack of opportunity or incentives to participate; the current socio-economic situation in Mongolia; Mongolian culture and history; Mongolian geography; the DO’s procedures; the dynamics of ‘groups’; and Mongolian government structures. In addition, it appears that projects which strive for higher levels of local participation will face not only these barriers (often exerting even greater restriction) but even more fundamental obstacles. In this study the majority of development staff and Mongolian participants interpreted participation as local contributions of group labour and information for material benefits, within a top-down authoritarian structure (including local institutions), which was inconsistent with higher-level participatory ideals of bottom-up decision-making controlling and leading the project. It appeared that higher-level participatory concepts hinder the DO’s ability to implement a time-bound, successful project which delivers tangible results. Moreover, bottom-up decision-making is not easily absorbed into rural Mongolian culture and society where top-down, authoritarian leadership is normative, and a prevailing mentality of dependence (belen setgeltay) means rural Mongolian citizens often lack the knowledge, skills and desire to embark upon independent development initiatives.
6.3 Implications

Having sought to provide an ethnographic snapshot of participation in Mongolian rural development projects, this research was based upon three case studies and was exploratory in nature. This limits the research’s ability to provide definitive implications for rural development projects in Mongolia and for development in general. However, the findings of this research can be used to highlight both challenges and opportunities for development projects in Mongolia and other similar countries, and hence yield a number of tentative recommendations and possible implications. Firstly, this research’s tentative recommendations for Mongolian rural development projects:

1. Development projects that adopt an interpretation of participation (ohrulzokh or hamrakh) as ‘local contributions of group labour and information for material benefits, within a top-down authoritarian structure (including local institutions)’ are suited to the rural Mongolian environment and will appeal to rural Mongolians. It would seem that higher-level participatory projects face significant, but not insurmountable, obstacles. To mitigate these obstacles, higher-level participatory projects may need to start out with elements of the dominant Mongolian interpretation of participation to build the trust and local capacity needed for rural Mongolians to fully engage in bottom-up development initiatives.

2. Groups are an appropriate mechanism for development activities in Mongolia. Groups can be most effective if: their members are selected internally; they consist of friends and family; membership is based on the household unit; and the group contains two to eight households. Groups that are formed after a significant period of training and seminars means participants build social capital which enhances the group’s success. In addition, the presence of an external powerful agent (such as the DO’s staff) helps build trust between group members and provides an external monitor and rule enforcer.

3. While it appears that PRA techniques are useful in gathering information, because of the power-differentials in Mongolian culture, these should be applied in smaller workshops (less than thirty people) of relatively similar stakeholders (for example, female herders, or herders with less than 100 livestock, etc.) in order to reveal specific and more representative information.

4. Tangible benefits need to be one of the central goals of projects, with cash-generation an important element. If the project’s activities entail latent benefits, then short-term, repeated
material handouts (rice, flour, cash, etc.) will be required to ensure the poor are able to participate in the project. Furthermore, because the ‘poorest of the poor’ (nen yadoo) face substantive obstacles to participation in projects, specific nen yadoo development projects with immediate material benefits, more hands-on assistance and workshops, and therefore a longer-term approach, are called for.

5. Local staff (Sum or Bag) should be utilised in all stages of the project’s cycle. They need to be chosen from the local community and spend time with participants within and outside the formal activities of the project, which will in turn build trust, relationship, and respect. Meanwhile, Aimag and Ulaanbaatar staff still need to spend lengthy periods at the field level not only in a formal manner but also informally socialising with participants.

6. DOs need to work within, and alongside, local government institutions when implementing projects to act as a power-broker or advocate between them and the Mongolian participants.

7. The knowledge disseminated to Mongolian participants should be as pragmatic and skill-orientated as possible, and taught through hands-on practical demonstrations by expert teachers and former participants. Workshops and seminars have to accommodate the rural lifestyle and therefore need to be held outside peak work times, planned well in advance, be given in short block courses, and have a clear, set purpose. Moreover, workshops and seminars may need to be repeated in locations outside the sum and aimag centres to allow those who are more isolated the opportunity to attend. Meanwhile, because workshops and seminars allow relationships and social capital to form they should include informal or ‘hospitable’ elements, such as celebrations, games, and shared meals, as well as formal activities that focus on creating linkages between participants, staff, and local authority figures.

8. Rural Mongolians need to be provided with detailed information about the project prior to its implementation. This should include information about the project’s goals, the sequence and nature of activities, the material resources which will be provided and the intended benefits, and the commitment required to participate. This information should be disseminated through local staff and former/current participants, local government agencies, radio stations, schools, and festivals, like Nadaam.

Secondly, this research’s possible implications for development in general:
1. Indigenous people interpret participation and hence engage with rural development initiatives in a manner which reflects their culture, historical experiences, and the local context (socio-economic, political, and geographical). Thus, while local decision-making is seen as the fundamental element of participatory approaches, it may in fact be regarded as undesirable by indigenous people for cultural, historical, or practical reasons.

2. Local circumstances of poverty greatly affect indigenous peoples’ ability to participate in rural development initiatives. Resource, mental, social, and physical poverty can mean indigenous people are not selected for, are unable to join, need to leave, or benefit unequally from projects. Furthermore, because of poverty indigenous people require immediate, repeated material benefits to participate in projects which inhibit their normal survival strategies. In this regard, projects whose activities are based upon local decision-making but have no pre-set material rewards may prove unattractive to the poor. Meanwhile, it is not solely economic factors which influence participation; hence consideration also needs to be given to the social motivations for participation.

3. Barriers to participation are deeply ingrained in the specific local culture, history, and context and are directly related to how stakeholders interpret participation. Hence, a thorough understanding of the unique characteristics of the local context – gained through long periods of time spent living in the local community, and a thorough understanding of their own world views – will greatly equip development staff in their efforts.

6.4 Final Remarks…
This study has shown that stakeholder interpretations of participation in Mongolian rural development projects bear little resemblance to the ‘pure’ form of participation idealised in development literature. This is because, although the world is often referred to as a ‘global village’, the age-old differences between nations and people groups still remain relatively unchanged. Thus, rural Mongolia has its own unique culture and context which dictates how development staff and local people interpret participation and engage in development initiatives. Therefore, participatory ideals are unable to transcend field-level realities, and nor should they be expected to, as long as the people-centred paradigm holds primacy within development.
References


Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues* (pp. 1-34). London: Sage Publications Ltd.


Appendices

Appendix I: Research Information Sheet

Type 1: Development Staff and Local People

Lincoln University Agriculture and Life Sciences Division
Research Information Sheet

You are invited to participate as a subject in a project entitled:

Escaping the rhetoric: A Mongolian perspective on participation in rural development projects.

This project will contribute to the research content of a Masters of Applied Science at Lincoln University, New Zealand. This project is being partly funded and supported by NZAID (New Zealand’s International Aid and Development Agency). The aim of this research study is to explore how those involved in Mongolian rural development projects understand the concept of participation and the benefits derived from rural development projects.

Your participation in this project will involve a 60-minute interview asking questions about your involvement in a rural development project and your understanding of this project. The interview will be recorded only with your permission.

You will be asked to sign a consent form to acknowledge your voluntary participation in this study. You may decline to answer any question, or finish the interview at anytime. Until July 1st, 2008, you may withdraw any information given. If you do withdraw your information at any stage, this information provided will be destroyed.

The results of the project may be published or presented at conferences, and any data gathered from the project may be shared with the assisting development agencies. The complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation is assured; the identity of participants will not be made public without their consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality only the researcher and the supervisors will have access to your consent forms and data, and all consent forms will be kept under lock and key and password protected. Any written presentation of the data will contain pseudonyms, and all individual identifying characteristics will be removed. The researcher will be pleased to discuss any questions you have about participating in the research study.

The project is being carried out by:

Researcher:
Jared Berends
berendsj@lincoln.ac.nz or jared.berends@gmail.com
Ph. 99604551

Supervisor:
Dr. Rupert Tipples
tipplesr@lincoln.ac.nz
P O Box 84, Lincoln University.
Canterbury, New Zealand.

The project has been reviewed and approved by Lincoln University Human Ethics Committee.

___________________________________________________________________________

Линкольн их сургуулийн хөдөө аж ахуй ба амьдралын шинжлхүүг үхтаа салбарын судалгааны мэдээлэлдийн хуудас

Төсөлийн нэр: Хөдөөгийн хөгжил төсөлүүдийн Монгол дахь ач холбогдол ба оролцоо

Та энэ төсөлд оролцохоор үрийгсэн болно.
Type 2: Informants on Mongolian Culture

Lincoln University Agriculture and Life Sciences Division
Research Information Sheet

You are invited to participate as a subject in a project entitled:

Escaping the rhetoric: A Mongolian perspective on participation in rural development projects.

This project will contribute to the research content of a Masters of Applied Science at Lincoln University, New Zealand. This project is being partly funded and supported by NZAID (New Zealand’s International Aid and Development Agency). The aim of this research study is to explore how those involved in Mongolian rural development projects understand the concept of participation and the benefits derived from rural development projects.

Your participation in this project will involve a 60-minute interview asking questions about your understandings of Mongolia and experience of Mongolian culture. The interview will be recorded only with your permission.

You will be asked to sign a consent form to acknowledge your voluntary participation in this study. You may decline to answer any question, or finish the interview at anytime. Until July 1st, 2008 you may withdraw any information given. If you do withdraw your information at any stage, this information provided will be destroyed.

The results of the project may be published or presented at conferences, and any data gathered from the project may be shared with the assisting development agencies. The complete confidentiality of data gathered in this investigation is assured; the identity of participants will not be made public without their consent. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality only the researcher and the
supervisors will have access to your consent forms and data, and all consent forms will be kept under lock and key and password protected. Any written presentation of the data will contain pseudonyms, and all individual identifying characteristics will be removed. The researcher will be pleased to discuss any questions you have about participating in the research study.

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Линкольн их сургуулийн хөдөө аж ахуй ба амьдралын шинжлхүүний ухаан слбарын сүүлээг сүүлчлүүлэн хүүдээс

Төвсөгт: Хөдөөгийн хөгжил төсөлүүд Монгол дахь ач холбогдол ба оролцоо

Та энэ төсөлтөөр оролцоо орчим болно.

Энэ төсөл бол магистрийн сүүлчлүүлэн ажиллын нэг зэрэг ёсэн юм. Энэ төсөлтөөр зарим талаарх Шинэ Зеландын нислэл улсын тусламж хөгжлийн агентлаг намдаж байгаа. Энэ сүүлчлүүлэн зорилго бол бид хоёр хооронд ялгатай хүмүүс Монголын хөдөөгийн хөгжил төсөлд ярц оролцоо тухайн ёлгүүлэгт нэг зэрэг ёсэн ёс. Тэр нэг зорилго нь эдгээр хүмүүс хөгжлийн төсөлүүдийн ач холбогдолтой талаар ямар өөрөөгүй хүмүүс Монгол улсын бага мөнгөний соёл ёс захиш. оролцооны талаарх 60 минутын асуулт хариуцлагаад оролцоо нь таны оролцоо юм. Зөвшөөрөл таны зөвшөөрөлтөөр зорилго нь шийдвэрлээе энэ ярилицлагаагаа дуу бичлэлгийн апарант болчих болно. Та энэ сүүлчлүүлэн оролцоо нь эсэхээ өөрийн шийдвэрлэлт болно. Та энэ сүүлчлүүлэн тусламжтай бинох болгон ярилицлагаагаа йамар үед дуусах боломжтой. 2008 оны 07 сарын 01 хүртэл та төсөлтөөр гарч бөгөөд гарвал таны бүх мэдээлэлгүй оролцоо болно. Энэ төсөлтөөр дунг хөгжил өөрөөхөөр таних зөвлөлдөөр бусад бүхий тусламжтай өөрөө болно. Энэ төсөлтөөр дүгнэлт болсон мэдээлэлд хамгаалагдана. Энэ төсөлтөөр дүгнэлт болсон мэдээлэлд нүүрлээлээ ч байрлах болно. Оролцогчийн хувийн мэдээлэл бүрэн зөвлөлдөөр бусад өөрөө болно. Таны зөвшөөрөл бол өөрөө өөрөө хөгжилтэй мэдээлэл болсон мэдээлэлд ярилицлагаагаа зөвшөөрөлтөөр бусад өөрөө болно.
Appendix II: Consent Form

Consent Form

Name of Project: Escaping the rhetoric: A Mongolian perspective on participation in rural development projects.

I have read and understood the description of the above-named project. On this basis I agree to participate as a subject in the project, and I consent to publication of the results of the project with the understanding that anonymity will be preserved. I consent to the interview being recorded using a digital recording device. I understand also that until July 1st, 2008, I may withdraw from the project, including withdrawal of any information I have provided.

Name: ________________________________________________________________

Signed: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________

Зөвшөөрлийн бичиг

Теселийн нэр: Хөдөөгийн хөгжил теселүүдийн Монгол дахь ач холбогдло бөө оролцоо

Би дээр теселийн нэрний тодорхойлолтыг уншаад ойлгосон. Уүний үндсэн дээр би энэ теселд оролцохыг зөвшөөрч байна. Нэр хэрэглэхүүнээр энэ теселийн үр дүнг хэрэглэхийг би зөвшөөрч байна. Мөн энэ ярилцлагыг дуу бичлэгийн аппаратаар бичих болно гэж зөвшөөрч байна. 2008 оны 07 сарын 01 хүртэл би теселес гарч болно гэж ойлгосон. Хэрвээ би теселийн гарвал миний мэдээлэл ашиглаж би ойлгосон.

Нэр: ________________________________________________________________

Гарын усэг: ____________________________ Он_____ сар_____ едер_____
Appendix III: Questions and Prompts for Semi-Structured Interviews

1. Questions and Prompts for Development Organisation Managers

Background:
- Where are you from?
- When and why did you come to Mongolia?
- What is your role in this organisation?
- How long have you been in this position/organisation?
- What were you doing before coming into this position?

Organisation:
- What does this organisation do in Mongolia?
  o Length of time, specific focus, number of employees?

Participation:
- How do you understand the term ‘participatory rural development’?
  o Purpose, tool, empowerment?
- Does this organisation implement ‘participatory rural development’ projects?
  o What makes them participatory, policies and procedures, staff training, techniques, methods?
- What Mongolian words does your organisation use to describe ‘participatory rural development’?
  o Within policies and procedures, when communicating with staff and local people?

Local People:
- What role do local people have in the development project?
  o Project identification, analysis, control, decisions, local knowledge?

Benefits:
- How does participating in development projects impact local people?
  o Non-tangible, tangible benefits, importance, satisfaction, community benefits, individual benefits, sustainability?

Barriers/Problems:
- Are there any difficulties with participatory development projects?
  o Please explain, examples, staff/local people misunderstandings, division/conflict, culture, history?
- What prevents local people from participating in development projects?
  o Choice, barriers, gender, local elites?

2. Questions and Prompts for Development Project Managers

Background:
- Where are you from?
- What is your role in this organisation?
- How long have you been in this position/organisation?
- What were you doing prior?
- How often do you speak English/Mongolian?

Organisation:
- How do you understand the term ‘participatory rural development’?
  o Purpose, tool, empowerment?
- Does this organisation implement ‘participatory development projects’?
  o What makes them participatory, policies and procedures, staff training, techniques, misunderstandings?
- What Mongolian words does your organisation use to describe ‘participatory rural development’?
Project Participation:
- How are local people involved in this project?
  - Identification, analysis, decisions, control, local knowledge, importance, empowerment.
- Why do local people participate in this project?
  - Not participate, choice, selection process?
- What is the role of this organisation in this project?
  - Local staff, expert knowledge, decisions, control, time spent on field?
- Do all members of the community participate in this project?
  - Who, gender, age, social status?

Benefits:
- What impact does participating in the project have on local people?
  - Non-tangible, tangible benefits, negative impacts, community benefits, individual benefits, continuing after project, non-participation?
- What are the most important benefits of this project?
  - Individual, community, satisfaction levels, captured by whom?

Barriers/Problems:
- Are there any difficulties getting people to participate in this project?
  - Please explain, staff/local people understandings, choice, barriers, culture, history?
- Have there been any problems or misunderstandings in this project?
  - Please explain, disagreements (amongst community, with project staff), outcome.

3. Questions and Prompts for Development Project Field Staff

Background:
- Where are you from?
- What is your role in this organisation?
- How long have you been in this position/organisation?
- What were you doing prior?

Organisation:
- What does the term ‘participatory rural development’ (in Mongolian) mean to you?
- Does this organisation implement ‘participatory’ development projects?

Project Participation:
- How are local people involved in this project?
- Why do local people participate in this project?
- What is your role in this project?
  - ‘Outside’ knowledge, decisions, control, time spent on field.
- Who is in control of this project?
  - Why, who makes what kind of decisions?
- Should the local community be involved more or less in the project?
  - Why, how, any pressure to give local people more control?

Benefits:
- What impact does participating in the project have on local people?
  - Non-tangible, tangible benefits, negative impact, community benefits vrs individual benefits, continuing after project, non-participation?
- What are the most important benefits of this project?
  - Individual, community, satisfaction levels, captured by whom?
- Who else benefits from this project?
  - Yourself, organisation, government, local government, most important?

Barriers/Problems:
- Have there been any problems or misunderstandings in this project?
4. Questions and Prompts for Development Project Participants

Background:
- How old are you?
- What are your current and past occupations?
- How long have you lived here? (If a short time – why did you move here?)
- Have you been involved in any other development projects?

Organisation:
- What does the term ‘participatory rural development’ (in Mongolian) mean to you?
  - Purpose, tool, empowerment?

Project participation:
- Please tell me about the project, both the good and the bad?
- How are you involved in the project?
  - Identification, information, analysis, decisions, control, local knowledge, contributions (labour/time/resources)?
- Who isn’t involved in the project?
  - Why?
- Why did you become involved in the project?
  - Choice, motivation?
- Who is in control of the project?
  - Please explain why, why not you/project staff, is your opinion heard, should local people have more or less control, what prevents local control, is it important?
- What is the role of the project staff?
  - Decisions, control, ‘outside’ knowledge, facilitator?

Benefits:
- What impact has participating in the project had on you?
  - Non-tangible, tangible, negative impacts, sustainability?
- What are the most important benefits of the project?
  - Individual, community, satisfaction levels?
- Are you satisfied with the benefits of the project?
  - Why, why not, prior expectations of the project?
- Who else benefits from the project?
  - Community, family, organisation, central or local government, who gains the most?

Barriers/Problems:
- Has this project caused any problems?
  - Please explain, within the community, disagreements, conflict, problems resolved?
- Has participating in this project caused you any problems?
  - Time, labour, disagreements, misunderstandings?
- In your opinion what prevents local people from participating in projects like this?
  - Culture, time, misunderstandings with project staff, different priorities, opinions not heard?

5. Questions and Prompts for Non-Participants

Background:
- How old are you?
- What are your current and past occupations?
- How long have you lived here? (If short time – why did you move here?)
- Have you been involved in any other development projects?

**Organisation:**
- What does the term ‘participatory rural development’ (in Mongolian) mean to you?
  - Purpose, tool, empowerment?

**Project Participation:**
- What do you know about the project, both the good and the bad?
- How are you involved, or have been involved in this project?
  - Decisions, control, local knowledge, contributions (labour/time/resources)?
- Why are you not involved more in the project?
  - Choice, barriers, motivation, problems.
- What would cause you to participate in a future development project?

**Benefits:**
- What impact does the project have?
  - Non-tangible, tangible benefits, negative, community/family/individual benefits, continuing after project?
- Who else benefits from this project?
  - Community, family, organisation, central or local government, who gains the most?

**Barriers/Problems:**
- Has this project caused any problems?
  - Please explain, disagreements within community, problems resolved?
- Has not participating in this project caused you any problems?
  - Exclusion, missing out on benefits?

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### 6. Questions for Informants on Mongolian Culture

**Background:**
- Please tell me about yourself and your time spent in Mongolia.
- Have you been involved in any development projects?

**Culture:**
- In general is the individual or group more important to Mongolians? Please explain.
- Would you say Mongolian society is hierarchical or egalitarian? Please explain.
- With regard to group decision making in Mongolia what typically determines the outcome, the quality of the idea or the power of the person behind the idea? Please explain.
- What general characteristics do Mongolian leaders have?
- What would prevent Mongolians from speaking directly to someone?
- What would prevent Mongolians from voicing their opinion in a group situation?
- When Mongolians face hardship who do they turn to for help?
- In Mongolia, what builds trust between people?
- In Mongolia, what is the cause of most of your misunderstandings with people?

**Development Projects:**
- Why would Mongolians want to work for development agencies?
- What do Mongolians expect from development projects?
- Some development projects want local people to participate so they can be used as a source of local knowledge, labour and resources. Would this type of project be useful or cause any problems in Mongolia?
- Some development projects want local people to take control of the project, meaning they do their own analysis, make decisions and lead the project. Would this type of project be useful or cause any problems in Mongolia?