

Challenges to participatory development: The Mongolian example

A részvételi alapú fejlesztések kihívásai Mongóliában

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Abstract

The aim of the study is to identify some barriers to strengthening direct citizen participation in Local Development Funds, a mechanism to involve local people at the decision-making level by evaluating public participation. The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum, developed by the International Association for Public Participation was used in the study. This study will contribute to explaining citizens' participation level in LDF. The results may suggest potential legislative and structural changes for the fund and defining new community social worker roles in Mongolia. Furthermore, the results will clarify what actions are needed for sub-administrative units to increase citizens' participation.

Keywords: citizen participation, participatory development, democracy, sustainable development

Absztrakt

A tanulmány célja, hogy azonosítson néhány akadályt, ami a helyi fejlesztési alapokkal való közös, részvételi alapú munka megerősödését gátolja. A helyi fejlesztési alapok létrehozása olyan mechanizmus, amelynek révén a helyi lakosokat, bevonják a döntéshozatalba. A szerző az International Association for Public Participation IAP2 spektruma segítségével értékelte a részvételt. A tanulmány segít az alapokat illetően az állampolgári részvétel szintjének értelmezésében. Az eredmények alapján felmerülnek jogi és strukturális változtatások az alapokkal kapcsolatban, és új szerepek fogalmazódnak meg a közösségi szociális munka területén Mongóliában. Továbbá, az eredmények világossá teszik, hogy milyen cselekvésekre van szükség az egyes körzetekben ahhoz, hogy növekedjék az állampolgári részvétel.

Kulcsszavak: állampolgári részvétel, részvétel alapú fejlesztés, demokrácia, fenntartható fejlődés

Introduction

Citizens' participation is a critical element of democracy. "Participation is the sum of the human transactions which take place voluntarily (within and across organizations) in a society aiming to achieve sustainable development and life satisfaction" (Picciotto, 1992, p. 5). According to Maser (1997), participation refers to community involvement in the decision-making process while taking initiatives. One well-known form is the Spectrum of Public Participation model which describes the different levels of public engagement and assists community organizations in defining and deciding the public's participation in democratic decision-making processes. It specifies five main modes of participation that fall on a progressive continuum of increasing public influence over decision-making in a civic-engagement process (Organizing Engagement, n.d.).

The basic values of a social worker are social justice, accessibility, equality, diversity, and participation. The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum is relevant to social work as it provides a framework for engaging with communities and stakeholders in a meaningful and inclusive way. Social workers often work with diverse populations and communities, aiming to address social issues and promote social justice. By utilizing the principles of the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) spectrum, social workers can effectively help involve individuals, families, and communities in the decision-making processes that impact service users' lives. The IAP2 spectrum of public participation comprises five levels:

1. Inform: Providing the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities, or solutions.
2. Consult: Obtaining public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or decisions.
3. Involve: Working directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.
4. Collaborate: Partnering with the public in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.
5. Empower: Placing final decision-making in the hands of the public (International Association for Public Participation, 2018; Organizing Engagement, n.d.).

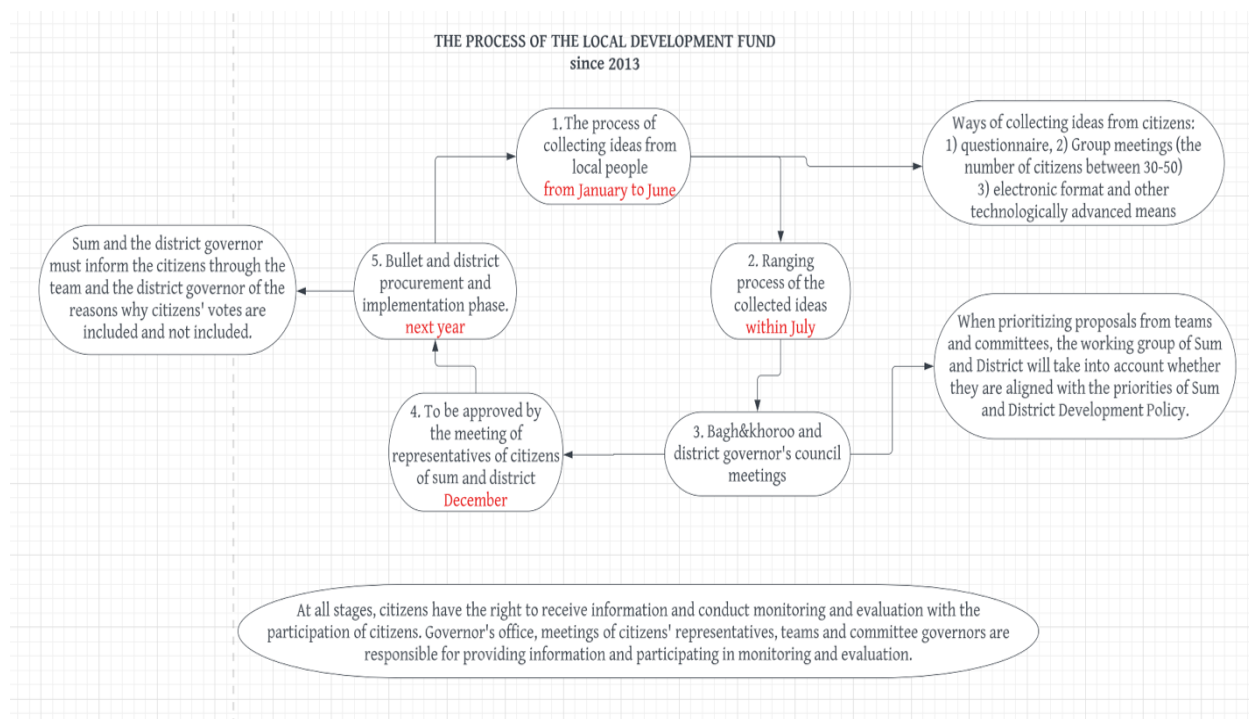
Participation is also linked to improved public services, enhanced social justice, and "a society of self-assured citizens" (Brodie, 2009, p. 6. cit. Beetham et al., 2008:11). Participatory development is now identified as an essential goal on agendas of practically all development agencies – international, governmental, and private (Mathur, 2017), and has become a way of project implementation. Grant funding policies have been changed to engage local people to become more self-reliant, independent, and cooperative.

Mongolia is a democratic country, which fact is included in the Constitution. There are two ways to ensure citizen participation and involve people in the decision-making: direct and indirect procedures. In Mongolia, to use the participatory development method, a mechanism named Local Development Fund (LDF) was introduced to encourage local decision-making directly. LDF

promotes well-being locally and supports life satisfaction in every aimag¹ and soum². LDF was legalized through Budget Law in 2011 and is a citizen participatory tool for the financing of investments in a particular aimag, the capital city, soum and districts. LDF aims to support local development and establish stable living conditions for citizens. In other words, LDF is “money” that should be spent based on citizens' opinions. LDF will be spent on investments, programs, projects, and events that have received votes from citizens, are in the public interest, and can benefit many people. In other words, any citizen can submit a proposal that is in the interest of the public, rather than a response to the problems of the family or individual. (Sustainable Livelihood-3 Project Implementation Unit, 2019). LDF is not a lending fund. Funds are to be spent only on constructions that are in the public interest, and by citizens' votes.

This paper used a grounded theory approach to identify some challenges that occur in the process of the LDF using the IAP2. There are five main processes related to this fund represented in Figure 1.: collecting ideas, defining the priority of the collected ideas termed as the ranking process, a council meeting to present results of the ranking process, approval by the soum's representatives, a meeting of the citizens, and the implementation phase. The Local Development Fund is an example of a broader participatory development approach that has been implemented in Mongolia.

Figure 1. *Processes of LDF (own compilation)*



¹ Article 6, Clause 1 of the Law of Mongolia on administrative and territorial units and their governance: within the scope of the functions specifically assigned by law, the aimag shall make independent decisions on economic and social issues, regulate district activities, ensure the fulfilment of laws and regulations, and exercise control. <https://legalinfo.mn/en/edtl/16231130572841>

² Sub-administrative unit

In the operating procedure of the local development fund, at all stages, citizens have the right to receive information and conduct monitoring and evaluation of the participation of citizens. The Governor's office, meetings of citizens' representatives, teams, and committee governors are responsible for providing information and participating in monitoring and evaluation.

Citizen participation

The participation rate differs significantly between the different localities and nationalities. A variety of factors can either encourage or discourage involvement. These components may be internal to the community, such as regional cultural norms, or they may be external, such as the type of political structure currently in place. According to Oakley (1991, cit. Ira, n.d.), the three basic types of participation barriers are political, administrative, and social ones. There are numerous other difficulties, e.g., problems with community mobilization, capacity building, planning, collaboration, and sustainability (El-Gack, 2007, cit. Brohman, 1996). Thomas (2013) mentioned some additional contemporary challenges of participatory development, namely, the bureaucratic attitudes of donor agencies and governments. She highlighted the role of the administrative structures related to development assistance, participatory governance, gender, communication, and access to information, reaching and involving people living in extreme poverty, monitoring and evaluation, and indigenous participation (Thomas, 2013, p. 5). Further challenges concern the additional skills needed by the development professionals, material and immaterial resources, the problems faced during the process of facilitating community development, such as the time-consuming nature of the process, the lack of experts working and living in the local area, as well as problems in research, process evaluation, and performance. Regarding the effectiveness of participation, it greatly depends on the practitioners (staff) who have specific skills to facilitate the process, cultivate beneficial connections with citizens, and deliver successful results (Peng, 2020). For instance, in Asian countries, such as, for example, Cambodia, Nepal, or the Northwest Highlands of Vietnam, it is crucial to identify local knowledge and skills.

Vabi (2001) highlighted three common problems when they implemented participatory development in six villages. These are:

1. Potentially erroneous problem diagnosis
2. Costs of promoting community participation ("This requires time and skilled professionals, making it an expensive venture. Because effective community participation develops from field sites where lessons and skills can be harnessed, it can be, and usually is expensive for conservation-development organizations" (Vabi, 2001, p. 22).
3. Community constraints often demand multi-institutional interventions.

When the local citizens are asked about their main problems, a list of common questions, focussing on the absences and needs emerge. In most cases, these communities want specific improvements: the construction of roads, as well as improvements in education and health facilities, and investments (loans) to finance the developments (Vabi, 2001).

Research question

What is the level of community participation in the Local Development Funds?

Methods

Nine structured interviews were conducted with LDF stakeholders, such as the representatives of local citizens, the members of the committee, experts, and representatives of the donor organization. The structured interview was complemented by a questionnaire and focus groups. The instrument included demographical questions, questions about the LDF, knowledge about citizen participation, participation experiences, and evaluation of LDF to identify potential barriers. It comprised open-ended and Likert-scale questions. Participants gave their written consent to using the data for the purposes of the research.

I used thematic analysis to explore the data. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is its flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Thematic analysis is a structured method for analysing, interpreting, and managing qualitative data in a way that facilitates to proceed from data to conceptualization (Tomitsch et al., 2021).

To understand the sampling procedure, mention must be made of the administrative units in Mongolia. The country consists of 21 aimags and 9 districts. There is a divided unit at every single local level named *khoroos*³ and *soum*. Mongolia has 152 *khoroos* and 333 *soums*. According to the Law of Budget, the Law on Administration and Territory and its Management, and LDF procedure, they must report to the government to conduct the annual performance evaluation. This research is based on the three different evaluation units, and aims to recognize some obstacles that may be present in the system of LDF. The annual performance evaluation is based on the following six criteria: citizen participation, planning, transparency, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and property management.

Based on the evaluation of the citizens' participation section of the evaluation of annual results issued by the Ministry of Finance, three localities with good, medium, and poor evaluations were selected and included in this research.

In terms of annual performance in 2018, Arkhangai aimag reached high results, Zavkhan was average, and Bulgan had the lowest numbers. From each of the above locations, one bullet was selected for good, medium, and poor ratings. The annual work reports of the above provinces help distinguish clearly between good and poor results.

Table 1. 2017–2018: Ratio of average scores for *soums*, by aimags

Names of aimags	Community participation	Planning	Transparency	Performance	Monitoring and evaluation	Property management
Arkhangai	5.14	1.40	1.01	1.45	2.24	1.44
Bayan-Ulgii	1.33	1.21	2.21	1.12	0.70	1.52
Bayankhongor	5.82	1.31	1.58	1.37	2.82	1.60
Bulgan	0.86	1.11	0.58	0.57	0.65	0.81

³ It is the smallest administrative and territorial unit and is present in every locality.

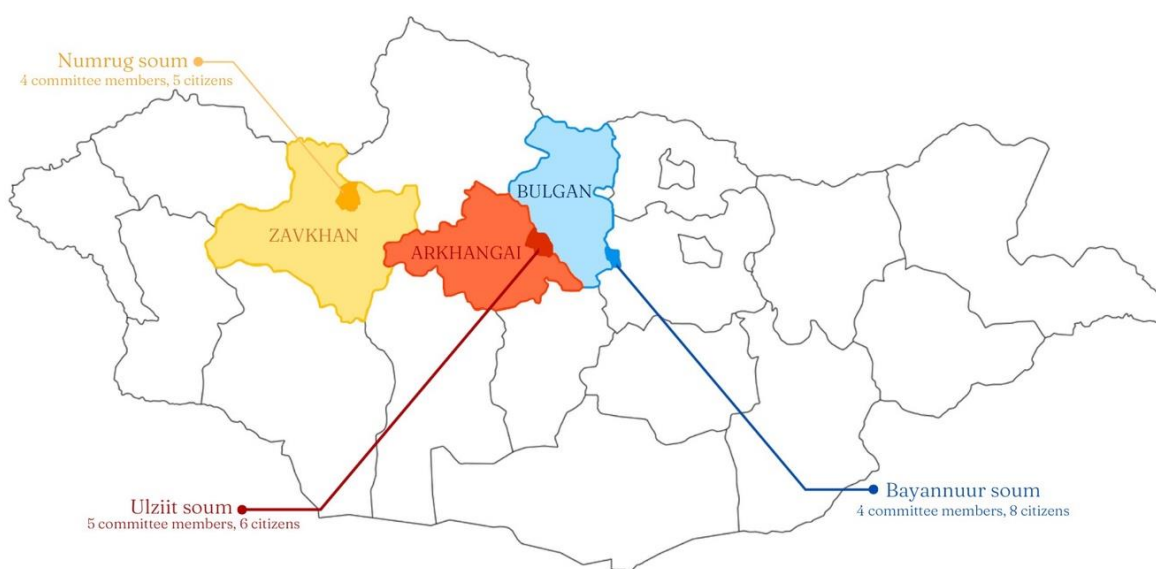
Govi- Altai	2.07	1.05	0.87	0.87	1.25	0.87
Govisumber	1.96	1.46	5.13	2.12	1.15	1.12
Darkhan-Uul	1.00	1.07	1.95	1.33	1.01	0.98
Dornogovi	0.99	1.03	1.09	1.08	5.83	1.07
Dornod	2.16	1.54	2.36	1.23	23.70	1.30
Dundgovi	0.92	1.12	0.54	0.89	4.51	0.98
Zawkhan	2.41	1.35	1.56	2.96	1.40	1.19
Orkhon	1.21	0.93	0.86	0.89	58.36	1.73
Ovorkhangai	3.31	1.40	1.55	1.35	1.88	1.34
Omnogovi	0.90	1.08	1.05	1.03	1.17	1.05
Svkhaatar	3.99	1.36	1.47	1.58	2.05	1.95
Selenge	3.20	1.40	1.40	0.63	2.28	1.60
Tow	2.88	1.45	2.13	0.98	2.58	1.26
Uws	2.34	1.43	1.76	1.21	2.93	1.66
Khovd	2.43	1.45	1.14	0.75	2.81	1.02
Khuwsgul	1.38	1.36	1.48	1.33	1.44	1.29
Khentii	1.89	1.26	0.82	1.18	2.90	1.05
Average growth	1.99	1.29	1.29	1.13	1.91	1.21

Table 2. shows targeted samples in the three localities.

Table 2. Sampling areas with the ratio of citizen participation

Nº	Cases	Names of chosen aimags	Ratio	Chosen soums	The ratio of citizen participation
1	High	Arkhangai	5.14	Ulziit	82%
2	Medium	Zawkhan	2.41	Nomrog	54%
3	Low	Bulgan	0.86	Bayannuur	36%

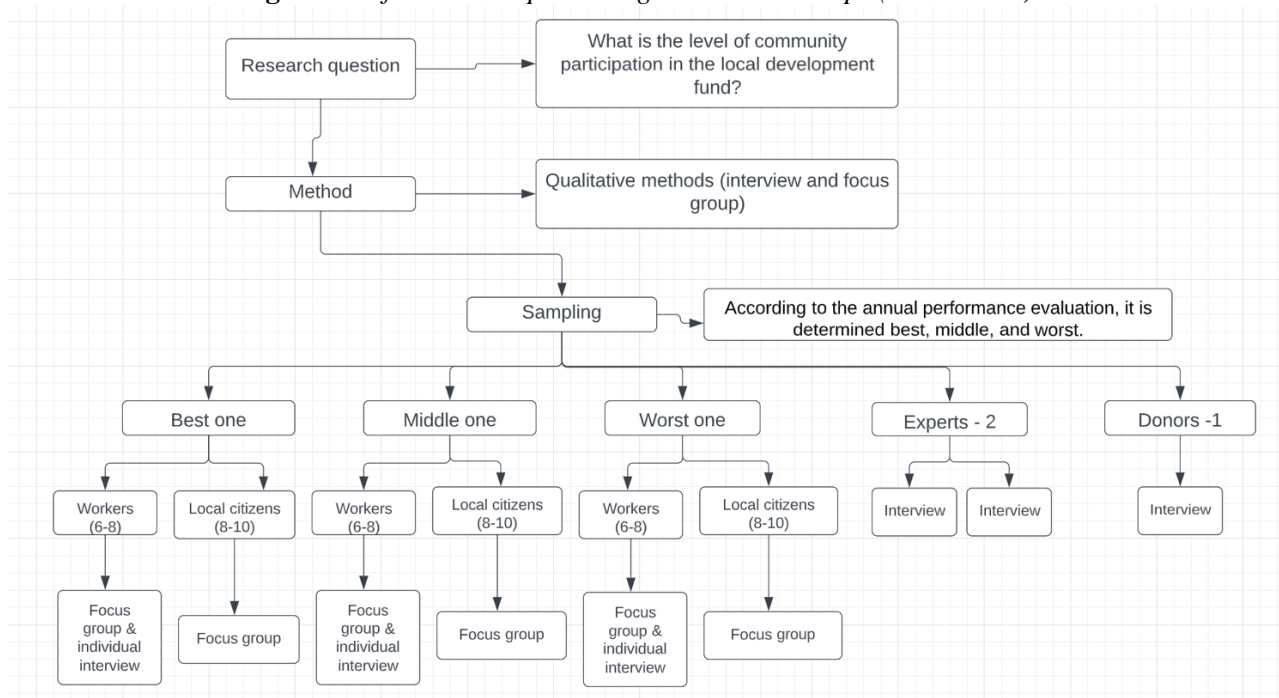
Figure 2. Geographical information about sampling areas (own source)



The three aimags that were selected are located in the central and western sides of Mongolia. In the subsequent part of this paper, Arkhangai aimag is represented in red, Zavkhan in yellow, and Bulgan in blue.

Figure 3. is a flowchart about the entire research process, involving the structured interviews and focus groups, and Table 3. is a summary of the samples used in this study.

Figure 3. A flowchart representing the research steps (own source)



Total number of individual interviews: 3 (experts and donor).

Total number of focus groups: 6.

Table 3. Summary of the samples

№	Samples		Number of participants			Types of interviews		Date
			Female	Male	Total	In-person	Online	
1	High (Ulziit, Arkhangai)	Committee	4	1	5		+	18.01.2023
2		Citizens	4	2	6		+	19.01.2023
3	Medium (Numrug, Zawkhan)	Committee	4		4		+	24.01.2023
4		Citizens	3	2	5		+	02.02.2023
5	Low (Bayannuur, Bulgan)	Committee	3	1	4		+	19.01.2023
6		Citizens	6	2	8		+	14.02.2023
7	Experts	NGO	1		1	+		13.01.2023
8		National expert	1		1	+		17.01.2023

9	Donor		1		1	+		20.01.2023
	Committee				13			
	Citizens				19			
	Experts				2			
	Donor				1			
	Total		27	8	35	3	6	31 days

In this sample, the first groups are citizens who live in the selected areas and have contributed with their ideas to the LDF at least on one occasion.

Citizens' group №1. Ulziit soum, Arkhangai province is the best example of the citizens' high-level participation in the LDF in 2018. They received extra financial support from the government because of their enthusiastic participation. The ratio of citizen participation was 82% in 2018. Of the six participants, four participants were women and two were men. One of them was a teacher at a secondary school, two were herdsmen, one person in a private business running a pharmacy, an environmental specialist, and the head of the cultural centre.

Citizens' group № 2. Numrug soum, Zawkhan province is the representative of the average annual performances as determined by the Ministry of Finance, and their ratio of citizen participation was 54% in 2018. There were five participants, three women and two men.

Citizens' group № 3. Bayannuur soum, Bulgan province is an example of weak citizen participation. Their ratio of citizen participation was 36% in 2018. There were eight participants, five women and three men.

Results

First, I summarize the results for each of the selected provinces, and then compare the three provinces.

Multiple perspectives

Representing multiple perspectives are an important part of any stakeholder analysis. The stakeholder analysis helps understand partners better and increases the chance to manage the different interests effectively. LDF are related to the people living in the area, which means that everyone is a stakeholder in some way. Stakeholders can be internal or external to the organization or project and can vary as for their impact and importance. In this context, committee members, governors, and citizens' representatives are considered internal stakeholders, and the citizens are the external stakeholders. A high level of participation equals to a kind of citizen control and monitoring. This is why politicians may try to avoid or tend to ignore participation to protect their interests and keep power.

Knowledge about citizen participation and participation experiences

Q № 1. How do you define an active citizen?

Respondents described people who can initiate ideas, express their own opinions, and distinguish between needs – the priorities, and issues of secondary importance. On the other hand, it is also about the expression of their conscious, reflected actions.

Community representative, weak participation: “Generally, it’s a citizen that consistently goes to the team meetings. The citizen voices out what is working and what isn’t. Some people are active in donation events. That is an active citizen attribute.”

Community representative, average participation: “A person who actively participates in any social issues is called an active citizen.”

It is broadly defined as a person who actively participates in social issues.

Community representative, high-level participation:

Respondent 1. People like our deputy chief are called active citizens. An active citizen is a person who takes many new initiatives and can communicate the activities of the government to the citizens.

Respondent 2. People who are proactive, responsible, and actively participate in any activity in their life and work can be defined as active citizens.

In addition, respondents often referred to the frequency of participation.

Focus group participants mentioned five different qualities or roles of active citizens, such as participants, initiators, information transmitters, connecting others as bridges, and problem solvers. In conclusion, local people conceive active citizenship as the ways of expressing actions, performing duties, exhibiting specific human attitudes, and the frequency of participation is also considered important.

Evaluation of the Local Development Fund to identify barriers

This evaluation focuses on the processes related to the LDF, and the issues that may occur in this process. To compare these areas, I made some comparisons between three sub-samples, calculating the average evaluation of the total number of respondents. The results are summarized in Table 4. below. The table includes 16 questions, each sampling area, and the average scores by each citizen and committee. The first part shows the processes of LDF, step by step.

Table 4. *The average points of all 6 groups and experts*

		“Best” sampling area Ulziit, Arkhangai		Average sampling area Numrug, Zawhan		“Low” sampling area Bayannuur, Bulgan		Expert 1 – S	Expert 2 – A
		Citizens n=6	Committee n=5	Citizens n=5	Committee n=4	Citizens n=8	Committee n=4		
Processes of the local development fund									
Q1	Ways of announcement	2.2	4	5	4	5	2.4	3	2

	about citizens' ideas to collect								
Q2	Ways to get your vote	4	5	5	3.2	3.8	2.4	2	2
Q3	Ranking process of citizens' ideas	2.6	5	5	4	5.2	3	3	1
Q4	Implementation	6	3	5	3.2	4.8	3	3	2
Q5	Feedback about your idea or projects	5.4	4	5	4	5.4	1.8	2	1
Q6	Sustainability	5.4	5	4	3	4.8	3	2	2
The average scores		4.3	4.3	4.8	3.5	4.8	2.6	2.4	1.6
Challenges									
Q1	Citizens' participation	1.6	2.8	3.3	2.6	2.5	2	3	2
Q2	Opportunity to involve representatives of the vulnerable groups	3.4	3.1	4.1	2.6	2.3	1.5	2	1
Q3	Methods of receiving feedback from citizens to the local development fund	3.8	2.3	3.3	2.6	5.3	2	4	3
Q4	Time for citizens to submit ideas to the local development fund	4	3.8	3.3	2.8	6	1	4	4
Q5	Knowledge, experience, and independence of the working group that summarizes the ideas	1.5	3.5	3.3	2.8	2	2	2	1
Q6	The size of the budget	3	2	0.8	2	1.3	2	1	2
Q7	Delivery of information on whether the proposal was received	0.5	3.6	3.3	2.6	3.6	2	0	0
Q8	Roles and participation of bagh's governor	0.7	2.8	2.5	2.3	4.6	1.5	1	2
Q9	Independence of CRM Presidiums	3.5	2.5	3.3	2.5	2.1	2.5	1	0
Q10	Transparency of bagh's Citizens'	3.6	4.1	3.3	2.5	2	2.5	4	2

	Representative meeting								
Average scores		2.56	3.05	3.05	2.53	3.17	1.9	2.2	1.7

Processes of LDF

Q1. Ways of announcement about the opportunity to collect citizens' ideas

The members of the two committees included in the sample, whose citizen participation was evaluated as good or medium, evaluated the ways of disseminating information to citizens as reasonable or 4 points. On the other hand, the committee members gave a rating of 2.4, which is poor or below the average, for the places where citizens' participation is assessed as weak. Both specialists rated below average. Those who consider it the worst are the representatives of the citizens of Sample 1. To summarize, the procedure followed by the local government is simply to pass on the information to local people, a one-way communication

Q2. Ways to get your vote

The respondents in the sample, two of the three groups and the two experts rated the process of obtaining opinions as below average, while the others considered that it is being performed at an above-average or reasonable level. Looking at the methods used to gather input, it can be concluded that this stage is positioned at the consultative stage of the IAP2 hierarchy. Consultation methods include polling, regular posting of information on bulletin boards, introduction of questionnaires, surveys, and interviews.

Q3. Ranking process of citizens' ideas

The process of grouping and prioritizing the list of possible tasks collected from the citizens by obtaining many opinions was evaluated by the representative of the citizens of Ulziit Soum, Sample 1, as poor, while one of the experts evaluated the process as very poor. This may be related to the procedure, in which only members of the working group participate when counting the votes received from the citizens. Citizens have little confidence in the members of the working group who represent the government.

Q4. Implementation

Except for one expert, respondents generally rated this section as above average. However, there is no opportunity for the citizens' representatives to monitor the implementation process in practice.

Q5. Feedback about your idea or projects

This question is fundamental to the direct and collaborative level of citizen participation. If they give information about the ideas collected from citizens, then this means that they are involved in a two-way communication in the LDF. It was observed during the interviews that the feedback mechanism is the most problematic. Respondents generally rated this as good.

Q6. Sustainability

Except for the two experts, sustainability was assessed as above average or reasonably implemented. However, there is no opportunity for both parties to participate equally, which would be important when communicating with the citizens who have voted.

Generally, if we look at the average ratings given in the six stages, the internal stakeholders, and the stakeholders who have the function of organizing the activities of this fund gave lower ratings than the external stakeholders.

What level of citizen participation is the most common in the LDF process?

Table 5. shows the processes of LDF, step by step.

Table 5. *Citizens' participation levels in the LDF*

№	Process of LDF	The Hierarchy of Participation IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum			
		Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate
1	Announcements to collect citizens' ideas	+			
2	Ways to get your vote		+		
3	Ranking process of citizens' ideas	+			
4	Implementation		+		
5	Feedback about your idea or projects				
6	Sustainability	+			

According to the responses of the citizens' representatives, members of the committees, and experts who participated in the interview, information about the collection of citizens' opinions in the LDF has been managed by the local administration. This indicates that communication is unidirectional, and the participation score is at the information transfer level. Respondents have confirmed that the number of people who come voluntarily, inquire, and vote for LDF is lower than the average. In Mongolia, citizens have two main ways to participate in government activities: directly and indirectly. The latter is also called representative participation. No one mentioned this type of involvement during the interviews.

Evaluation and Challenges

Q1. Citizens' participation in your area

Except for the representative of the citizens of Numrug Soum, whose evaluation was a little better than the average, all of them evaluated the participation of the citizens as poor or below 3. Importantly, their ratings are below average, though an active partnership should be established between a developmental program within the community and the community itself.

Q2. Opportunity to involve representatives of the vulnerable groups

There are few opportunities for vulnerable groups to participate in the LDF. The needs of vulnerable groups of citizens are not being met and it affects their chances of integration into society. It is appropriate to determine the exact share of the vulnerable groups among local citizens and ensure the possibility of their participation by the legal regulations of LDF. This must be reflected in the methodology of evaluating citizens' participation.

Q3. Methods of receiving feedback from citizens to the LDF

The participants of the survey evaluated the three different types of citizens' opinions differently. However, two experts rated this issue higher than respondents in the other samples.

Q4. Time for citizens to submit ideas to the LDF

While the citizens consider this period to be sufficient, members of the working group gave an average score of 3.

Q5. Knowledge, experience, and independence of the working group that summarizes the ideas

Knowledge, expertise, and the independence of internal stakeholders were rated as poor or below average by all the respondents.

Q6. Size of the budget

The people who participated in the interview had no information about the size of the budget allocated to the locality, regardless of whether they got good, average, or poor grades in the final evaluation of the year. In addition, working group members and experts believe that the amount of money allocated to the locality is low or very low. There is a need in all localities to regularly provide information about the budget to citizens, including the exact amount.

Q7. Delivery of information on whether the proposal was received

All of them rated the delivery of information about whether the offer was received as very poor. It is worth noting that two experts rated it as 0.

Q8. Roles and participation of the bagh's governor

The role of the governors, who are one of the internal participants, was judged to be poor, except for one locality.

Q9. Independence of CRT Presidium:

The independence of the meeting of citizens' representatives, which has the function of discussing and approving the opinions gathered from the citizens, was also assessed as poor. This suggests that the decision may be influenced in an unfavourable way. The meeting is one group among the internal stakeholders and this is where important decision-making processes take place.

Q10. Transparency of the bagh's Citizens' Representative meeting:

This means the transparency of the process of finalizing what kind of work is going to be carried out from the work proposals collected from the citizens. Three samples rated above average, while the rest of them rated the item as poor.

Respondents tended to give above-average scores on the questions related to the general process, while below-average scores were given concerning the detailed and more specific questions.

Challenges

Citizens and committee members who participated in the interview said that there were problems related to the stages of LDF activities. On the other hand, there are different types of challenges, for example, access to information, citizens' passive attitudes, the timing of collecting the ideas, the necessary budget for this phase, the lack of knowledge and skills of the members of committees, and some external influences.

Table 6. Comparisons between the areas

	Existing challenges				
	Poor	Medium	Strong	Experts	Donor
1 st stage	+	+	+	+	+
2 nd stage	+	+	+	+	
3 rd stage	-	+	-	-	
4 th stage	+	+		+	-
5 th stage	-	-	+	+	+

Note. + means there is some problems, and - means there is no problem.

Table 7. is a summary of the challenges of LDF, step by step. Most of the challenges occur in the first two steps.

Table 7. Mapping the challenges

		Challenges discussed during the interviews				
		1 st stage	2 nd stage	3 rd stage	4 th stage	5 th stage
Theme 1	Work experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weakening the activity of citizens - There is no professional method of working with citizens - Unprofessional - In some cases, they do not work stably at their workplaces - No orientation training for new hires 				
Theme 2	Situational limitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Animal diseases (herdsmen) - Lockdown - Restrictions 				
Theme 3	Participation level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - If you look at the five stages, two of the groups are reporting, one is trying to cooperate, and the remaining two have no citizen participation - Vulnerable groups have almost no chance to vote. This shows the isolation of these 				

		people from the rest of the society.				
Theme 3	Geographical distance and poor infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is no public transport connecting Bagh Sum - so citizens have only one option to vote - when they come to the centre of Sum for some other reason - In the 1st and 2nd season, voting meetings coincide with the herdsmen's calving season 				
Theme 4	Weather factor	The time for collecting votes is during the cold season of winter. Due to weather factors, people do not come.				
Theme 5	Law and order issues		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Refine the list of tasks that can be implemented on the operational procedures of the LDF - Communication about collecting LDF-related opinions and feedback provided to citizens is poor - Team leaders are political officials. It is considered political influence. 		There is no responsibility for changes in citizens' opinions	
Theme 6	Lack of information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People don't know what to vote for - People's activity is weak - Members of the working group should give 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There will be problems related to the independence of representatives of citizens' meetings 	

		examples of work to be done in a certain way and write down their suggestions - Mistrust - Lack of motivation for future participation.			- Potential future changes in the coordination of the general development plan of Sum	
Theme 7	Political influence	- Change citizens' opinions - Bring a group of people to a team meeting in an organized manner and support their proposal - It is possible that political activities are taking place, such as directing the voting process to one side, lobbying for the votes, etc.				
Theme 9	Administration and Budget	- There are not enough finances for working in rural teams - Lack of vehicles for working group members				
Theme 10	Specialist skills	- It is changed every four years, and that is why there is a lack of expertise - There is no training related to LDF activities for those new to the working group, Manuals are scarcely available				

The challenges involved in the process are quite complex. In addition to the similarities also experienced internationally, there are some specific Mongolian challenges.

Relevance for social work

LDF is a way to ensure direct citizen participation in the decision-making process at the local level and is a mechanism in the smallest state units in Mongolia, the khoroo, soum, and bagh. It is about citizen initiations and votes, based on their needs for the development activities related to LDF to make adjustments in their environment and contribute to social well-being. It is one example of a participatory development approach that has been implemented in Mongolia. When misused, participatory development might be a way to manipulate the public into getting involved in a predetermined process and meet the external requirements. On the other hand, it is a precious tool to support democratization and empowerment (Keough, 1998). To support community empowerment is one of the social workers' duties.

A participatory form prevails in this process. This means that citizens can vote, join, engage, and share their views, voices, feelings, actions, and reflections, but cannot control the outcomes of the process or participate in decision-making. "Each one of us can make a difference (...) many big changes come from many small actions of many, many people" (Chambers, 2013, p. 3).

Therefore, the Ministry of Finance of Mongolia is implementing the Sustainable Livelihood-3 project within the framework of the Financing Agreement between the Government of Mongolia and the World Bank. The purpose of the Sustainable Livelihood-3 project is to improve citizen participation and governance in the planning and implementation of priority investments in rural areas (Ministry of Finance, 2018). The Sustainable Livelihood-3 project is implemented in 21 provinces and 330 of the smallest government units all over Mongolia except the capital city. This project highlights the public initiatives and participation in all stages, for instance, in creating, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating developmental programmes.

Our goal is to improve the quality of life and maintain it equitably for every individual. (Keough, 1998). The key to participatory development includes the collaborative efforts of people, taking initiatives by themselves to work for the improvements. This demands changes in their cognitions and deliberations (Dinbabo, 2003). On the other hand, it is about equality for everyone, providing human rights, sharing values, and having trust, giving people chance to decide for themselves and collaborate. The concept of empowerment is essential to both the concept and the practice of participation (Hartworth, n.d.).

Limitations

Citizen participation is a crucial theme in development, with a wide range of related concepts. There are various types and different chances of participation, and diverse ways of implementation. In Mongolia, quite number of documents are available about this topic, but these materials focus on the legislative system and opportunities at the political level. Contrastingly, this study focuses on a specific theme, Local Development Fund, and identifies obstacles to citizens' direct participation in this fund based on three selected rural areas. The study is not nationwide, consequently, not representative.

Conclusion

Participatory development is about citizens' voice and action to provide good chances for development for those who live in the locality. Since this approach has been put into practice, it has been changing, developing, spreading, and integrated into a variety of contexts. Practitioners focus on people who live in disadvantaged areas, and are exposed to vulnerable situations, and they try to enhance low living standards in the community. Recently, this has become one of the most widespread community engagement methods, facilitating citizens' initiatives as a people-oriented approach.

In response to my research question, local people know about LDF, its goal, and its primary considerations, but they do not precisely know the processes in the background. While most respondents knew what LDF was, they could not identify all the steps involved in LDF. Their answers were not complete. Moreover, no one mentioned the active and passive forms of citizen participation. Furthermore, no one talked about the hierarchies involved (the "ladder" of citizen participation). To conclude, they are not fully informed about LDF.

Political influence in the LDF process was not ruled out. Further, as experts' interviews have revealed, the independence of the committee staff responsible for ranking the opinions of the citizens participating in LDF as for the importance of the contribution and the number of votes, was given a poor rating. Those who took part in the research believed that there was a possibility of some political influence in the LDF's voting stage. It can be seen from the selected samples that attention must be paid to ensuring the independence of the people active in the working group of the LDF. One of the possible reasons for the emergence of the idea of potential political influence is the major role of the bagh's governor in the early stages of the LDF, which is the stage of collecting opinions from citizens and ranking them. These persons are political officials, holding their posts for four years. Often, people with poor knowledge of LDF are elected.

Problems concerning the LDF can be summarized as follows:

- Laws on citizen participation and community development funds have been adequately enacted, but law enforcement is insufficient. For example, the general directions concerning the work to be performed using the resources of the LDF are included in the operational regulations of the fund. According to the experts, it is necessary to adapt the list to match the functions, and to design with respect to the allocated budget. Adding tasks that are not related to LDF functions or are too complex leads to problems, namely, the work being stopped or not being fully implemented due to lack of the necessary funding. As a result, citizens may feel that their opinions are not taken into consideration, which may reduce their sense of commitment and responsibility.
- There are no officials responsible for mobilizing and activating citizens, except for the team leader. Soum, the primary administrative unit in Mongolia, does not have a social worker to work with the public. Social workers are responsible for social welfare instead. By creating new jobs for community social workers, and thus establishing the role of social workers in the activities of the LDF, professional human resources working with local people could be made available. Currently, there is a lack of development workers, such as social workers to provide professional assistance and support for the community. The issues El Gack (2007) mentions are the methodological problems of social work in working with

communities include community mobilization, capacity building, and collaboration. Developing community social work is one of the efficient solutions to support local citizens' self-reliance, critical awareness, and problem-solving skills. Social workers can inform service users about the available resources and services, consult with them to understand their needs and preferences, involve them in developing intervention plans, collaborate with them to address the challenges and advocate for their rights and promote empowerment. By incorporating the principles of the IAP2 spectrum, social workers can enhance transparency, inclusivity, and accountability in their practice, ultimately leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes for the individuals and communities they serve.

- The participants who took part in the research believe that the LDF is important. But they emphasized that there is still a need to make the process more clear and more understandable, especially the first two phases. Most of the problems arising in the LDF happen during these two steps.

According to the results of the interviews with the members of the committee, they believe that the participation of the citizens is insufficient. On the other hand, the employees of government organizations seem to accept the inactivity of the citizens more. Experts in the field of citizen participation emphasized that underestimating the abilities and capabilities of local citizens is a faulty attitude on part of the government.

Compared to the common international challenges in the overview, of the five problems mentioned by Thomas (2013), bureaucratic approach and poor conditions for communication and information are present in our country. There are also political and administrative problems, the ones mentioned by Oakley (1991, cit. by Ira, n.d.). What is not mentioned internationally is the timing and travel problems concerning the collection of votes from citizens who live geographically distant places and the weather conditions during the winter (on average –25-35 degrees centigrade) may prevent them from travelling. It cannot be denied that this situation can affect the attendance of citizens.

In addition, it almost never occurs that people come from the countryside only to vote because the infrastructure and public transport are not developed in the localities. If they have any other job to perform they are coming to the soum by car. The issue of cost also comes into play.

Generally, a mechanism that supports the direct participation of Mongolians is a definite advantage. However, nearly 10 years after the measure was implemented, continuous improvements must be made. The results of this research show that a more optimal solution to the problem of local development is necessary by improving the system and not repeating the mistakes.

Recommendations

Legislation and the structure of LDF

Experts and donor organizations mentioned in the interviews that under the current procedure, the Ministry of Finance alone provides the professional and methodological management of the activities related to LDF. In addition to the functions of the Ministry of Finance, it might be appropriate to include the Ministry of Labor and Social Security to participate in the activities of the LDF as their function is relevant in the process.

Creating the roles of community social work in LDF

Community work is one of the core areas of social work, comprising macro-level activities. Creating an appropriate legal environment for social workers working with the public and assuring the participation of the social workers in the stages of collecting proposals for working with citizens could improve the program. Using the theories and methods of social work to activate and mobilize the community could ensure more professional programme implementation.

Dissemination of information according to the characteristics of the specific group

Appropriately providing information to the citizens living in the community, e.g., considering the communication characteristics of the different age groups.

Drivers of citizen participation

To support the community, people should care about community drivers. Researchers have proposed several categories related to citizen initiatives. Drawing on stakeholder and institutional theory, the organization Involve (2005) identified four key drivers of citizen participation as initiatives, a variety of forms of participation, information and consultations, and active participation. The first one is governance promoting active citizenship, boosting political interest and involvement, and strengthening democratic legitimacy. The second one is social justice and community cohesion. Relationships, community cohesiveness, ownership, social capital, justice, and equity-building are the key components here. The third driver is enhanced public services that are more responsive to genuine needs, more effective, and more suited to addressing and integrating community values. The final one is learning and capacity growth. To establish an environment for future growth and development, and, particularly, to aid in the development of strong communities, more emphasis must be placed on enhancing the skills, abilities, and confidence, as well as empowering both the individuals and organizations.

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