



## WOLTS Mongolia Research Summary and Recommendations Note

Mokoro's practical and action-oriented long-term strategic research project, the Women's Land Tenure Security Project (WOLTS), is piloting its methodology through a 'Study on the threats to women's land tenure security in Mongolia and Tanzania'. Working together with People Centered Conservation (PCC) in Mongolia, we have been investigating the state of women's land tenure security in pastoral areas affected by mining investments, through both participatory qualitative and quantitative research to identify the main threats to the land rights of women and vulnerable groups. The WOLTS project's aim is to assess possible means to improve gender equity in land tenure governance and secure the land rights of vulnerable people within communities, as well as to support communities to withstand threats to their land and natural resources.

This Research Summary and Recommendations Note shares our findings from our fieldwork in Bornuur and Dalanjargalan soums in Mongolia between April and November 2016, including initial field visits, a baseline survey and a participatory fieldwork phase. The findings were validated during follow-up visits between June and August 2017. We are deeply grateful for the overall support of both soum governments and the engagement and hospitality of the people of Bornuur and Dalanjargalan throughout. We particularly acknowledge and thank all those whom we have interviewed and shared discussions with – for their willingness to participate and their invaluable contributions to helping us learn about gender, land, pastoralism and mining in Mongolia today.

### Baseline Methodology

Our baseline survey was conducted in August 2016 with 10% of households in each soum. In Bornuur it included 142 households, of which 111 were randomly sampled and 31 were additional female-headed households. In Dalanjargalan it included 93 households, of which 74 were randomly sampled and 19 were additional female-headed households. Thus 78% of the total survey sample in Bornuur and 80% in Dalanjargalan was randomly sampled (including 82 male- and 29 female-headed households in Bornuur and 57 male- and 17 female-headed households in Dalanjargalan) while 22% in Bornuur and 20% in Dalanjargalan comprised deliberately targeted female-headed households. This method was used to boost the total number of female-headed households surveyed so as to help uncover critical gender issues for vulnerable groups. Data from the additional female-headed households were only included in comparative analysis of male- and female-headed households and male and female respondents, and not in all the general baseline analysis.

### Participatory Fieldwork Methodology

Our participatory fieldwork phase took place in November 2016 and included 14 focus group discussions (FGDs) and 11 individual biographic interviews (BIs) in each soum, involving over 102 people in Bornuur and over 94 people in Dalanjargalan. Different types of social groups and individuals were specifically sought out for these discussions and interviews, so as to reflect different characteristics and issues that we considered worth exploring further after analysing our baseline results (e.g. widows, miners, married men and women, etc.). FGDs were structured around standard participatory exercises, including natural resource and migration mapping, seasonal labour analysis, and stakeholder analysis and institution mapping. BIs followed structured question guides that were tailored to the circumstances of the individual being interviewed in order to help us learn about people's lives and livelihoods and the ways both gender relations and access to different resources have changed since their childhoods. Our research also included interviews with local government officials and representatives of some of the mining companies and organisations in the two soums.

## Background

Mongolia has a long history and tradition of nomadic pastoralism that has survived both the socialist period and the democratic transition. Key minerals found in Mongolia are gold, fluorspar, zinc, iron ore, silver and lead, and there is a lot of mining at all scales countrywide. Gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution and in formal laws, with women allowed to own, apply for and register land individually or jointly with their families. Our two WOLTS pilot communities share a similar ethnic and religious make-up, mainly Khalkha and Buddhist, and both contain relatively youthful populations and women who are on average better educated than men. However, there are contrasts between them in terms of patterns of grazing, the scale and extent of mining, and types and depths of linkages with the wider Mongolian economy.

Bornuur soum is located in Tuv aimag, 115 km north-northwest of Ulaanbaatar. Its total land area is 114,687 ha, of which approximately 36,000 ha is forested, 68,000 ha is pastureland, and 8,100 ha is cropland. As at 3 March 2015, 18 mining licences had been granted in the soum – six for production and 12 for exploration. Bornuur's main mineral resource is gold. Bornuur soum is made up of four baghs, two of them more urbanised and two more rural, where most herders live. The total population of the soum as at 4 August 2016 was 5,059 people, living in 1,404 households.

Dalanjargalan soum is located in Dornogovi aimag, in the Gobi Desert, 288 km south-southeast of Ulaanbaatar. Its total land area is 404,590 ha, which is mainly desert-steppe pastureland. The Trans-Siberian Railway passes through the soum and 44,000 ha of the Ikh Nart Nature Reserve lies within its territory. As at 6 April 2016, 90 mining licences had been granted in the soum – 42 for production and 48 for exploration. Dalanjargalan's main mineral resources are coal, fluorspar, construction materials and iron, along with semi-precious stones (chalcedony). Dalanjargalan soum consists of five baghs, two of them physically smaller and more urbanised and three much larger and more rural. The total population of the soum as at 28 July 2016 was 2,641 people living in 916 households.

## Findings from Bornuur

Since Mongolia's transition to democracy in 1990, rapid urbanisation, land privatisation and degradation of pastureland have led to some people in Bornuur giving up traditional nomadic herding and becoming intensive or semi-intensive livestock farmers, and sometimes also crop farmers, cultivating medium-sized fodder plantations as well as vegetable plots. Many of our surveyed households in Bornuur engaged in both herding and crop farming and/or had a household member in formal employment, and it seemed during our fieldwork that almost every household in the soum also had at least one member who had engaged or was still engaging in artisanal mining, nowadays mostly young, unemployed men. An East German mining company operated in Bornuur from approximately 1979 to 1990 and since its closure the high levels of gold deposits in Bornuur have attracted other corporate investments as well as artisanal miners. One company (Gun Bilegt) operated between 1998 and 2012 and another (Centerra Gold) between 2003 and 2016, but it was unclear what corporate mining operations there would be in Bornuur in future due to as yet unresolved issues around the implementation of the 2009 'Long Name Law'.



Many people claimed that mining had not brought any benefits or work opportunities to Bornuur, but instead had just destroyed the local environment, increasing pressures on land. Growing alcoholism was a problem among male miners, and health problems were reported to be prevalent among both current and former miners, including deaths from lung diseases. As part of efforts to find solutions for the growing social and environmental problems attributable to artisanal gold mining in its earlier boom years, SDC's Sustainable Artisanal Mining Project helped to establish the

first umbrella organisation of artisanal miners in Mongolia in Bornuur in 2008, and a framework for the legalisation of artisanal mining was established in 2010 through amendments to the 2006 Minerals Law and the 2002 Land Law.

Women were mostly in charge of housekeeping, whereas men did most of the more physically challenging and outdoors work. However, there was a strong sense of complementarity, with many activities undertaken by household members together. Both women and men appeared to work hard, but women's time and work burdens were greater than men's because of childcare and household chores. Women also tended to deal with bank loans and land certification, but land documents were generally issued in men's names. Even though men were regarded traditionally as heads of their household, women seemed to have a strong role in household decision-making, with either the woman taking most decisions or the couple doing so together – except about the slaughtering and sale of livestock where decisions were usually taken just by men. Women generally also managed household funds and tended to be the ones who attended bagh and soum meetings, although the most powerful political positions were occupied by men.

Our fieldwork in Bornuur revealed many conflicts over land and natural resources in the soum, including a general increase in conflicts over different land uses since the former socialist times. These conflicts arose from the interplay of different changes taking place in the soum. Immigration into Bornuur was perceived to have contributed to land pressures, including land scarcity, land concentration, the development of a land market in non-residential land, and environmental degradation. The rapid socio-economic and environmental changes taking place in Bornuur against the backdrop of these pressures seemed to have had a bigger and more negative effect on poorer and more vulnerable people, including female-headed households and the young and unemployed, as they faced the most difficulties in accessing land and participating in local land management.

We heard reports that there were no more housing plots available for allocation in the soum centre and no more vegetable plots in Bornuur's irrigated farm area, but that people with money could now purchase or rent land for different purposes. There has been a rise in land certification, as well as increased privatisation of, and disputes over, the soum's haymaking areas – despite efforts by the soum government at resolution. Formal land ownership was widely perceived to be highly unequal, with a few rich individuals said to be holding (possessing or renting) large tracts of land for tourism camps, mining sites, haymaking and crop farming, and with poorer people unable to obtain any property titles, possession certificates or use contracts. The process of applying for different types of registered land was often seen as cumbersome, time-consuming and difficult to understand. It also seemed to be very difficult for young people to acquire new winter camps, as there were no more unallocated areas available. Further, while most older people had winter campsites that were recorded in the soum cadastre map, many did not actually have a possession certificate. Summer campsites were set up in the same place each year, where people had customary use rights.

“Every type of land now needs a property title or certificate.”  
(Elderly widower, Bornuur)

While mining has created new opportunities for people in the soum since the 1990s, artisanal mining remains tarnished by illegality and problems around health and alcoholism. However, the use of harmful chemicals has reduced since 2010 and artisanal mining has become more organised and less violent. At the same time, the interactions between local citizens and large mining companies have been very poor, with local people often seeming to be uninformed about companies' operations in the soum. Mining activities and the growing tourism industry in Bornuur have also had negative effects on water quality and quantity, which was a particular worry for herders. While for some herders life has improved in the last decades as they have been able to establish permanent houses and become semi-intensive or intensive livestock and crop farmers, for the majority relying on traditional nomadic pastoralism life overall has become more difficult. The increasing privatisation of different types of land has led to fences springing up all over the soum's pastureland, challenging

longstanding patterns of communal and shared use, and the remaining pastureland was perceived to have become heavily degraded at the same time as human and livestock populations have increased. All of these developments, as well as the pull of urban life, have caused young people to become disillusioned with herding and seek employment in the capital city, leaving older adults behind in the countryside.

While in a well-functioning herder household women's and men's roles were seen to complement each other and women seemed to hold relatively important powers over household decision-making

"I started working as a farm helper. Now I have some experience growing vegetables I could do it on my own if I got land. But it is so hard to get land."  
(Middle-aged widow, Bornuur)

and finances, we found several cases of women in Bornuur descending into tenure insecurity and poverty on widowhood. Although divorce was uncommon, it might also pose problems for women, given the prevalence of land certification in the sole name of the (male) household head.

Both women and men did not perceive there to be any discrimination by gender with regard to formal land allocation processes, only by wealth/poverty, and many women reported owning housing plots (and, to a lesser extent, small vegetable plots). However, access to pastureland was still traditionally negotiated by men, and female-headed households often struggled to maintain their access rights to pastures, summer camps and hay fields, and often lost out in disputes with other households; the rights of widows to these types of land were notably not well-respected. Furthermore, female-headed households were unable to shoulder the heavy workload and/or were unwilling to take on 'male' tasks in the presence of strong social norms that positioned herding as an activity for traditional male-headed family units. All these difficulties for female-headed households were exacerbated in the current context of high male mortality and morbidity as a result of mining, as well as the increasing overall land scarcity, concentration and degradation.

### Findings from Dalanjargalan

Life in Dalanjargalan appeared to have changed quite dramatically over the past 20 years, from being a mainly traditional herding society to one that has witnessed a period of rapid social change linked to a mining and industrial boom. The two main livelihoods in Dalanjargalan were herding and formal employment, and the soum included both longstanding citizens with traditional pastoralist roots and newer arrivals who were more connected to the wider economy through their jobs. Involvement in mining, particularly artisanal mining, was also very common, but crop farming was

of limited significance to local livelihoods. As in Bornuur, men in Dalanjargalan were in charge of physically strenuous outdoor activities, whereas women were responsible for taking care of the work inside the house or ger. Women were reported to be actively involved in household decision-making, but inter-family discussions about access to pasture and water sources were generally held only among men. These traditional divisions of labour made it very difficult for women to engage in herding without male support, and male-headed households were more likely to be reliant on herding than female-headed households for their livelihoods.

Mining in Dalanjargalan includes large-, medium- and small-scale coal and fluorspar production, plus iron and construction materials mining, illegal artisanal fluorspar and semi-precious stone mining, and a cement factory, fluorspar processing factory and more. The last two decades have seen a huge mining boom in the soum. At first only a few illegal miners sold fluorspar to Chinese traders, from around 1996, but the number soon reached several thousand as unemployed people from all over Mongolia were drawn by this income-earning opportunity to Dalanjargalan. Small and medium-sized companies started coming to Dalanjargalan from around 1997 and in 1998 the large-scale Mongolian



company, Mongol Alt Corporation (MAK), began its coal mining operations in the soum. Official data suggest a total area held under mining licences of 19% of Dalanjargalan's territory.

Conflicts and disputes over land and natural resources in the soum seemed to have increased with the development of the local mining sector from the late 1990s, both between miners and herders and among herders themselves. Participants in our fieldwork were almost unanimous in their view that mining has substantially contributed to pastureland degradation and the increasing scarcity of clean water. People shared concerns about social and health effects of mining, such as lack of local employment opportunities with mining companies and unhealthy working conditions due to dust, as well as environmental concerns, including the creation of many uncontrolled roads, reduction in quantity and quality of surface and underground water levels, and deep holes made by mining operations that cause livestock death. Both illegal artisanal miners and mining companies of all sizes were generally held in low regard, with mining seen to have done little for the community. Lack of information and awareness about the activities of mining companies and (illegal) artisanal miners contributed to these concerns, and we detected a general desire for the local government to take a more proactive role in consulting local people and monitoring mining companies to ensure that mining land is rehabilitated, and that the local environment and local herders' tenure rights to the pastureland are well protected. On the other hand, local people had benefited from markets for their meat, vegetables, shops and services from mining workers and factory employees, and there were some jobs in mining for local people too.

The main types of land subject to formal land allocation processes in Dalanjargalan were housing plots, under ownership rights, for those living in the two urban baghs, and winter and spring camps, under possession rights, for those living in the three rural baghs. As in Bornuur, it was women who tended to do the work to apply for land and obtain land titles and possession certificates, but in most cases the documents were titled in a man's name. The formal process of applying for land was very complicated and time-consuming, especially for remote-living herder households, and some people felt that not everyone was treated equally. The land allocation process appeared in general to be more inaccessible and complicated for winter and spring camps than for housing plots, with sometimes several families claiming ownership over one campsite and female-headed herder households particularly affected because they were not taken as seriously in the male-dominated herder environment.

"If a single woman comes close to someone's home or close to someone else's water source, that household could chase her away."  
(Married man, Dalanjargalan)

The expansion of mining in Dalanjargalan has created a perceived shortage of good quality pasture and disputes over pastureland have become commonplace. Coupled with the formalisation of land tenure through allocation of private rights to housing plots and winter and spring camps, practices such as fencing have started to increase while seasonal movement has simultaneously reduced. In the rural baghs it seemed that most families either stayed in their winter camps year round, or moved only very nearby, in order to guard and protect their rights to the pasture around their campsites. This trend towards more settled lifestyles puts further pressure on the sustainability of local pastureland. Thus although winter and spring camp titling (under possession certificates) was intended to help secure the tenure rights of herders over pastureland in areas where their families had had campsites and customary pasture rights for generations, disputes over land have in fact stimulated fears among some herders about losing their land or being left without any titled camps. This has reinforced the trend towards less movement and contributed to newly unfolding changes in traditional land management practices whose full effects are not yet clear.

The changing social and economic context of life in Dalanjargalan has also contributed to changing patterns in pastoral lifestyles and in gender relations within households and the community. Changes in pastoralist land management away from traditional nomadic migration and towards fencing private areas of pastureland have coincided with changes at the household level between



men and women in herder families. We saw this most obviously in the case of ‘split families’, with many couples living separately for much of the year in order to support their children’s education. Women who stay in the soum centre with their children have gained

“By tradition, there was no Mongolian family that would settle in their camp all season. But now there is no land for movement, so the tradition is changing.”  
(Married women herders group, Dalanjargalan)

opportunities to become more informed and increase their independence, in some cases taking advantage of new employment and trading opportunities, while the men who stay behind in the winter camps have to engage in domestic work as well as dealing with the increasing challenges of herding. Even though this new lifestyle brings certain opportunities to the whole family, for example by having a base in the soum centre from which to more easily follow up land applications and link into markets, its full effects have yet to be seen. In addition, there was the rise in ‘fake’ divorces – where a husband and wife register as citizens in two different soums so that the divorced woman could apply for land in a neighbouring soum to help the household increase its overall access to pastureland (by increasing the area around the campsites over which it had exclusive grazing rights). This was providing women with access to land in their own name, but might also put strains on the relationship and lead to a real break-up.

Nevertheless, within marriages there appeared to be a lot of trust between spouses, who were working hard to manage the household enterprise in the more challenging economic environment than many of them had grown up with and worked in during socialist times. However, there were clearly also still ways in which women in general, and certain women (and men) in particular, appeared to be disadvantaged.

## Overall conclusions

Bornuur and Dalanjargalan differ in various ways. Bornuur is much closer to Ulaanbaatar than Dalanjargalan and livelihoods were more diverse, with crop farming having played a large role in the local economy from socialist times. Dalanjargalan is much more of a traditional herding community, but the scale of mining activities (and related industrial development) was much larger and appeared to pose a greater threat to herders’ livelihoods.

Both soums have changed significantly with the transition from socialism to a market-based economy. As land has been privatised and is becoming scarcer, both fencing and fears of land loss have become more common in both communities, making seasonal nomadic movement more difficult. This reduction in movement, as well as general population and livestock increases, have in turn contributed to the perceived degradation of pastureland and to increased conflicts over pasture in both soums (and related conflicts over haymaking areas in Bornuur). Mining has exacerbated these problems, with its environmental impact much more pronounced in Dalanjargalan.

There appeared to be a major lack of information about mining licences and activities in both soums, and very limited engagement between mining companies and the local communities. Some local employment was created by mining companies, but in both soums people were more likely to be engaging

“The community doesn’t have the knowledge to engage with businesses and deal with local politics. Even when we try to hold community consultations, the community doesn’t know how to engage with us.”  
(Mining company representative, Dalanjargalan)

in artisanal mining. In Bornuur, illegal artisanal mining peaked after the opening up of the economy, but in Dalanjargalan both legal (small-scale licensed) and illegal artisanal miners seemed to be causing bigger environmental problems at the time of our research. While legal artisanal gold and fluorspar mining was often done by household members together, the illegal picking of semi-precious stones was often done by women. In both communities, artisanal mining was considered to be a very dangerous activity and a last resort for those without other livelihood options.

In both soums, the transition from socialism to a market-based economy, as well as the growth of mining, had specific gendered consequences. While women appeared to hold considerable decision-making power both within their households and in their communities (also related to their generally higher levels of education), we found that traditional gendered norms were still very strong. Herding was generally considered to be a male task, thus making it very difficult for widows and divorced/separated women to continue to engage in it, and, as conflicts over pasture were

“If I would want my name on the title, my husband would think that I would like to get divorced in the future.”  
(Married woman, Dalanjargalan)

increasing in both soums, the rights of female-headed herder households were less likely to be respected. At the same time, in both soums land was usually titled in the husband’s name due to the perception that he is the head of the household, even though some women also held possession certificates or were included on

joint certificates. In an era of increasing land scarcity, women without land titles may face considerable challenges upon widowhood or divorce. While divorce rates were still quite low in Bornuur, they were increasing in Dalanjargalan, for different reasons. While the common practice of ‘split families’ brought some advantages and opportunities to women, it was also seen to be putting family life under strain and leading to an increase in divorces. In addition, more and more herder households were obtaining ‘fake’ divorces, creating similar issues between couples from the strain of living apart.

Our research concluded that traditional nomadic pastoralism was increasingly threatened in both Bornuur and Dalanjargalan today. The general transition towards a market economy, the increase in mining operations in Dalanjargalan, and the increased competition over different land uses in Bornuur have all contributed to perceived pastureland degradation and decreasing movement of herders. In both soums, both internal and external threats therefore appear to have combined to make herders’ livelihoods very precarious today. On one hand, in Bornuur, government policy did not seem to promote pastoralist lifestyles, preferring intensive livestock and crop farming instead, and large tracts of land seemed to have been allocated for farming, tourism and mining investments. On the other hand, the perception was that these largely outsider-driven investments have negatively affected the quality and quantity of pastureland, water and forest resources in the soum, as well as local people’s health. In Dalanjargalan, the scale and extent of the growth in mining has combined with the (unintended) negative consequences of the formalisation of land tenure to result in major inter-linked changes both in traditional pastoralist lifestyles and in social and gender relations.

Herders have adapted in Bornuur by becoming semi-intensive livestock farmers and engaging in alternative income-generating activities (as also encouraged by government policy), while in Dalanjargalan families have developed a range of coping mechanisms, including living arrangements that seem unlikely to be socially sustainable in the long-term. At the same time, many young people are not interested in herding anymore and move to Ulaanbaatar to seek employment, especially from Bornuur. While women may be better equipped to compete in the broader economy due to their higher levels of education, this may also contribute to male violence and alcoholism, as well as to relationship break-ups. Further, not just female-headed households but also young male herders and those men who live separately from their families must be considered as vulnerable groups in both soums today.

Questions remain about what positive livelihood options there are for vulnerable groups in both soums, given our fieldwork findings about the difficulties in gaining access to land for both herding and crop farming, the dangers of mining, and the persistence of social norms about traditional gender roles. Small businesses and formal employment stand out as important alternatives, but are unlikely to be viable for all.

Instead, broader solutions must be found in improved governance of tenure of land and natural resources. In Bornuur there is a clear need for greater participation by all people in decision-making

about land and natural resources in general, and about pastureland in particular – including poorer people, and especially such vulnerable people as female herders and widows, as well as the sick and elderly poor – in order to protect these not insubstantial groups of Bornuur citizens from falling into long-term chronic poverty and tenure insecurity. Likewise, to address the many challenges around gender relations and mining in Dalanjargalan, it is important to find ways to share information more widely and increase all local people's involvement in the management and governance of land and natural resources, especially those poorer and more vulnerable people within the soum.

#### Key WOLTS Mongolia Research Findings

1. A general desire for local governments to be more proactive in monitoring mining companies to ensure land is rehabilitated and that the local environment, people's health, and local herders' tenure rights to pastureland are well protected.
2. A clear need to find ways to share information on mining and land more widely.
3. A clear need for greater participation by all people in management, governance and decision-making about land and natural resources, especially about pastureland.

#### Key recommendation

An integrated approach in both soums could address the many issues that have come up in our research, through all different stakeholders coming together for dialogue to reduce conflicts between different land users.

Regular bagh level meetings could create a space to enable different land users to discuss issues relating to local land tenure governance and land management and find solutions together in a very participatory way. They would need to:

- pay special attention to ensuring good participation by all people – men and women, rich and poor, young and old – and to bringing the most vulnerable people in the community into decision-making, including widows and female-headed herder households;
- include herders, intensive and semi-intensive livestock farmers, crop farmers, vegetable growers, forest user and nature conservation community groups, artisanal miners, other mining workers, local government officials, and large-, medium- and small-scale licensed mining companies and organisations.

This would provide an opportunity to share information, to raise awareness about laws and procedures, to discuss the rules for using different resources to see where changes might be needed, to develop the many detailed and constructive suggestions made by participants in our research, and to ensure participation of all people in the sustainable development of their soum.

PCC is a Mongolian NGO established in 2006, which promotes the protection of natural resources through support to the activities of local residents and civil society, with a strong commitment to addressing issues of gender equality and vulnerable groups. Mokoro is a not-for-profit organisation based in the UK, which provides technical advice on all aspects of land and natural resource governance.

For more information about Mokoro and the WOLTS project, and to sign up to our mailing list to be kept informed about WOLTS events and publications, please visit our website [www.mokoro.co.uk/wolts](http://www.mokoro.co.uk/wolts) or email Dr. Elizabeth Daley, Principal Consultant and WOLTS Team Leader: [edaley@mokoro.co.uk](mailto:edaley@mokoro.co.uk).

For more information about PCC please email Ms. Narangerel Yansanjav, Executive Director: [nyansanjav@yahoo.com](mailto:nyansanjav@yahoo.com).

The WOLTS Mongolia Team includes Daley, E., Narangerel, Y., Lanz, K., Lkhamdulam, N., Driscoll, Z., Suvd, B., Munkhtuvshin, B., Grabham, J. and Erdenebat, R. This Research Summary and Recommendations Note is the result of all our combined efforts. Text © WOLTS Team. All photo credits © WOLTS Team.