

Mongolia: Amidst COVID-19 pandemic, communities impacted by an ADB-funded road project file a complaint

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia – In late November 2020, impacted communities in the Ger district of Ulaanbaatar filed two complaints to the Asian Development Bank (ADB), against the Ulaanbaatar Urban Services and Ger Areas Development Investment Program - Tranche 1 2 and 3.

In the complaints, affected families stated that the road project violated ADB's social and environmental standards and caused numerous problems, related to inadequate land acquisition, compensation and resettlement plans; property damage; and poor road construction safety standards.

Tserendorj Oyuntugs, Director of 6 Buudal NGO, stated that "[t]he Selbe sub-center project affects peoples' lives and residents are leaving their homes because of risks caused by cracks in the wall and in the fences." She also added that "the project was supposed to alleviate poverty, but it is making the affected people even more destitute."

Initially, the impacted families resettled outside the town were promised 500 sqm of land, but now they are being offered 250 sqm, half of what was promised. Aside from that, they are only provided with a land possession title for five years instead of having their ownership title restored, which is something that is granted to each Mongolian citizen for free. One cannot build a home and livelihood on land with a 5 year permit.

The resettlement plan is also threatening the Mongolian traditional way of living as a "khot ail," where several generations of families customarily live together and share herding tasks [1]. Instead of giving a land certificate and compensation to each family that is part of the khot ail, ADB issued a land certificate and granted compensation to only one family.

The resettlement sites are located far away from people's original homes and business places, so their livelihoods are threatened. The Livelihood Restoration Program, which was put in place after complaints were filed in March 2018, is not proving to be effective and is barely covering those identified as poor, but not all economically displaced as a result of the resettlement.

Sukhgerel Dugersuren, Director of OT Watch Mongolia, says: "Because of the COVID-19 restrictions, it is difficult to get a clear picture of how many people are being resettled and why only cash compensation is being offered. It should be land for land or land for apartment with financial support for relocation, transition and livelihood support, where necessary. There appears to be no consistent and reliable information on the resettlement and relocation policy, the Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2018 which should apply to all affected people under this project is not being honored by the project implementers".

COVID-19 is aggravating an already dreadful situation, with family members stuck outside Mongolia due to the pandemic who were cut from compensation. One resident stated that "ADB continues to use every possible pretext to reduce compensation. My children are not eligible since they have not lived at this address in the last six months, but they are not here because they

are stranded elsewhere due to the lockdown".

Local residents have also been complaining because some parts of the construction site are trespassing into peoples' property. Families who were denied resettlement are now struggling to live, with a road blocking their doorsteps and construction rigs above their heads. Some families are being forced to flee without any compensation and assistance. Key concerns raised by all complainants is lack of safety and security for all but especially for children.

A local resident, Myagmarsuren Munkhzul, says: "I've been living for the past 15 years here, but the project is causing critical problems. The road is built right behind our plot, and since fences fall here, there is no guarantee that a car will not fall in, too."

The complainants call upon implementers to stop physical and economic displacement during COVID-19; bring the project into compliance with the financiers' safeguards policies as well as road standards; and honor the 2018 MoU agreements signed by all stakeholders.

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Oyu Tolgoi Watch (Mongolia) is a CSO that monitors compliance of IFIs financed mining and development projects with the international environmental and human rights standards. OT Watch supports local communities seek redress using international nonjudicial grievance mechanisms. www.minewatch.mn

For more information please contact Sukhgerel Dugesrsuren at otwatch@gmail.com or call 976-99185828.

NGO Forum on ADB is a network of civil society organizations (CSOs) that has been monitoring the projects, programs, and policies of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). To know more follow this link.

For more information please contact Jen, jen@forum-adb.org, mobile +639175088841.

[1] Bold, Bat-Ochir. "Socio-Economic Segmentation — 'Khot-Ail' in Nomadic Livestock Keeping of Mongolia." *Nomadic Peoples*, no. 39, 1996, pp. 69–86. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/43123494. Accessed 1 Dec. 2020.