



BRANCH DEVELOPMENT IN THE MONGOLIA RED CROSS SOCIETY

CASE STUDY



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INTRODUCTION

Mongolian Red Cross Society (MRCS) was established in 1939. In 2016, a change to the Red Cross Law led to the recognition of Mongolia Red Cross as a “National Humanitarian Organization” with a mandate as an auxiliary to the Government of Mongolia. The MRCS has a network of 34 mid-level branches, 803 primary level branches, 6400 trained volunteers, 517,000 members and supporters, 78,600 Red Cross youth members, and 598 ‘humanitarian organisations’¹.

Over the last seven years, MRCS has been on a transformation journey, one that has touched all aspects of the organisation; from its legal base, its structures, processes, culture and services. The public image of the MRCS has significantly improved as a result of this transformation as confirmed by a recent public perceptions survey and the successful Covid-19 fundraising campaign. Branches, as the service delivery arm of the organisation, have been at the centre of this transformation.

THE COUNTRY

Mongolia is a landlocked country bordered by China and the Russian Federation, with significant natural and agricultural resources. The country transitioned to a democratic, free-market economy and a multiparty parliamentary system in 1990. Mongolia ranks 99th on the UNDP Human Development Index out of 189 countries (2019).

While poverty has declined, there are disparities among regions – with poverty being more prevalent in the Khangai and western regions – and with greater poverty in rural areas. Over the past 30 years, urbanisation has transformed Mongolia. More than 45 percent of the population lives in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Unplanned peri-urban areas are home to more than 800 000 people. Challenges in these areas include access to safe drinking-water, sanitation and hygiene, air pollution, violence against women and children due to alcohol abuse, and unemployment.

Mongolia has a fragile ecosystem that is facing desertification and is vulnerable to climate change.

The country is affected by a range of natural hazards including drought, flooding, earthquakes and ‘dzud’. Dzud refers to extreme snow and ice conditions that lead to the death of large numbers of livestock that traditional herding communities (one third of the country’s population) rely on for survival. If a dzud follows a summer drought, livestock burn through their fat reserves faster and herders must use their hay reserves months earlier than usual. More frequent dzuds are pushing many herders to migrate to the capital, seeking alternative livelihoods.

1 MRCS organisational members



THE ROLE OF BRANCHES

MRCS branches are key players in disaster risk management, including preparedness for and response to dzuds, droughts and other disasters, including pandemics. Branches have trained disaster response teams (usually 15 volunteers) who are responsible for delivering humanitarian assistance (e.g. cash, livestock relief, food and non-food items) and the provision of first aid and psychosocial support. Outside the disaster risk management field, branches focus on social assistance activities that primarily target urban migrants, vulnerable older adults and single parents, children and individuals living with a disability.

“We are organising community activities. For example through our social care community centres, volunteers and beneficiaries gather to socialise and engage in dancing and playing, like chess. They also participate in training in life and vocational skills. Some of our herder beneficiaries have improved their livelihoods through our support. For example, they have learned how to bake goods and make dairy products, like ice cream and dry milk. We have provided equipment to these vulnerable families so that they can establish a small business. In 2018, we implemented a livelihood project with the support of Australian Red Cross across three branches for herder families. After this support families are more resilient when the dzud comes and have more economic options. We also supported herder families to create groups that have established collective businesses. So even though some families have lost their livestock they have other sources of livelihoods. Former herders that are migrating to capital cities, because they have lost their cattle are also receiving support to transition to other livelihood activities. For example, they are receiving business training and then they are invited to apply for small business grants.”

Undram Chinges

Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Team Leader
Restoring Family Links and Migration focal point
Mongolia Red Cross



THE TRIGGER FOR INVESTMENT IN BRANCH DEVELOPMENT

A change of leadership in 2014 led to a new strategy and a focus on developing branches. Public perceptions of the National Society were at an all-time low, with many viewing MRCS as a division of the Government, and with poor performance and poor visibility of services. The new national leadership team was determined to turn this around with the support of branches.

The branch development journey began with a revision of the National Society's Statutes which did away with government intervention in branch elections. A round of branch assemblies and elections was held in the same year. This was followed by an Organizational Capacity Assessment and Certification (OCAC) process and the mapping of capacities across branches, made possible by the application of the Branch Organisational Capacity Assessment process (BOCA).

In 2014 the first BOCA was conducted in 27 mid-level branches. Guidance was sent to mid-level branches and the branches self-assessed their capacities and activities. This was a new process for the branches. The results were higher than we expected. The branches saw this as a kind of examination. In 2015 we changed the methodology to a peer to peer assessment. The scores were also higher than we expected. In the OCAC our scores were around 30 to 40% whilst branches were scoring themselves at 80%. In 2017, the headquarter team facilitated BOCA across 28 mid-level branches. The results were more realistic. The last BOCA (2020) was also facilitated by the headquarter team. Branches are now more used to BOCA and are less afraid of the process and see it less as a competition and more as a way to learn and improve and as a basis for developing their plans."

Undram Chinges

Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Team Leader
Restoring Family Links and Migration focal point
Mongolia Red Cross

So, 2014 was a busy year for the National Society! Equipped with an organisation-wide view of branch strengths and areas for development, and consolidated data on branch revenue and expenditure, the National Society embarked on an ambitious planning and budgeting process involving all 34 branches. For the first time, all branch managers and accountants congregated in the capital with their national counterparts to develop the National Society's 2015 annual plan and budget. There was a particular emphasis placed on encouraging a balance between branch administrative costs and investments in service delivery.

"We asked them to make an annual action plan and budget. This was new for them. They never consolidated like that. As a headquarter we were able to see how branches were spending money and in which areas. Sometimes branches make mistakes, such as spending all money on management part (salaries, heating etc) instead of activities in communities. This annual action plan and budget is a good exercise for branches to budget activities with balance."

Ms. Purevjav
Board Member
Mongolia Red Cross

BRANCH ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY ASSESSMENT

MRCS adopted the BOCA process in 2014. Annually BOCA is implemented as a means of assessing the performance of branches and to inform branch planning. The National Society compares results from one annual process to the next, analysing where branches have improved or regressed. For example, the following table shows improvements in performance in Mid-Level Branches (MLB) in 2019 across four attributes (autonomy, diversity, conflict resolution and financial management) compared to the 2017 BOCA results.

2017		2019	
Strength	# of mid-level branches	Strength	# of mid-level branches
Autonomy	27	Autonomy	28
Diversity	23	Conflict resolution	28
Conflict resolution	23	Financial management	27
Financial management	21	Diversity	24
Emblem Usage	17	Sharing Information and Decision making	21
Branch Assembly			
Community Participation			

BRANCH DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

MRCS' branch development framework was inspired by the point system in the Sri Lanka Red Cross' *beyond re-engineering initiative*, the Philippine Red Cross' Chapters Classification System, and the BOCA attributes. Embedded in this framework is compliance to the legal base of the MRCS.

The branch development framework takes into consideration the services delivered by the branches, representing 50% of branch performance. The other 50% focuses on branch management. Through this framework, MRCS has promoted the idea of minimum activities/ services that branches must deliver as their contribution to the accomplishment of the National Society's strategic plan. These minimum activities are framed by the organisation's four core programme areas: disaster management, social care and inclusion, public health and youth. The branches each determine the focus and scale of their services and are responsible for raising the required resources in cash and in kind to enable service delivery.

“Our mid-level branches have employees. But our primary level branches are led by volunteers. Mid-level branches are responsible for forming and supporting primary level branches. They provide training to primary level volunteers in first aid, psycho-social support, disaster preparedness and response. Primary level branches at the 'soum' and 'khoroo' levels are responsible for identifying needs and organising humanitarian activities. The primary level branches can be based in secondary schools, local health centres or private businesses. For example, the secondary school teachers and students organise disaster preparedness simulations and first aid stations, organise hygiene education and life skills training. Youth clubs are established at schools and through these clubs peer to peer activities are run. In this way, in a country where students do not have a strong voice, the National Society is supporting a stronger voice and role for young people.”

Undram Chinges

Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting Team Leader
Restoring Family Links and Migration focal point,
Mongolia Red Cross



LEGAL BASE

Following the revision of the Red Cross Law in 2016 and the revision of the organisation's Statutes, the National Society established the *State-Red Cross Cooperation Council*. This Council has high level ministerial participation and aims to support the National Society to effectively fulfill its auxiliary role at all levels. The strong partnerships between the National Society and various governmental agencies have resulted in increased resourcing from the government for local level action. Parallel State – Red Cross coordination councils are now being established at the provincial and district level. Educating branches on the different aspects of the legal base of the National Society has been an important element in this process and in ensuring the local level coordination councils are based on a strong understanding of the auxiliary role.

“Ensuring understanding of our legal base, especially the Statutes, by all levels of the National Society is very significant. This is especially important that we are now establishing the MRCS primary level branches A successful primary level assembly will be largely dependent on having members at the primary level branch who are perceived by the communities they come from as neutral, independent of politics, and passionate humanitarian actors and diplomats on behalf of the most vulnerable in their communities. All MRCS training shall . . . systematically integrate key provisions of our Statutes and membership information so that the MRCS can turn its members into active membership concept, volunteering in their local communities to mobilise humanitarian resources and actively help the most vulnerable.”

Mme. Bolormaa

Secretary General
Mongolia Red Cross

BRANCH AUTONOMY

MRCS is proud to describe itself as a decentralised organisation. This was a strategic objective for the national leadership; developing the autonomy of branches was important for ensuring branches became more responsive to their local contexts.

“The mid-level branches – they do have their own decisions. They do have a right. They do have their own board members. Based on their planning. We do not get involved in the decision-making process as a headquarter. So, we very much respect mid-level branch decisions. But they also have responsibilities. When we are doing the BOCA every year two years now, as a headquarter, we need to know what is happening in the mid-level branch. The BOCA is a good tool for monitoring mid-level branches.”

Ms. Purevjav

Board Member
Mongolia Red Cross

BRANCH TO BRANCH SUPPORT

Branch peer support has been an important element in MRCS' branch development journey. The BOCA process has provided the National Society with an up-to-date overview of the strengths and weaknesses of each branch. This information is used to match branches with strong capacities in one area with branches who need support in that area. For example, Darkhan branch has good capacities in fundraising and this branch has been supporting Bulgan branch in the West with fundraising. Similarly, Bulgan has good capacities in providing support to vulnerable herding families and has been advising Darkhan branch in this area. Increasingly, branches are arranging their own exchanges without the headquarters having to act as an intermediary.

“For example, one of our central region mid-level branch managers has visited five branches in the east and this was organised directly between the branches.”

Ms. Purevjav

Board Member
Mongolia Red Cross



BRANCH-LED HUMANITARIAN ACTION

MRCS sees its branches as “independent organisations” with headquarters providing policy guidance and technical support. Branches raise their own funds and develop their own annual plans and budgets within the wider frame of the National Society’s core programmes, disaster management, social care and inclusion, public health and youth. This means that branch activities are inspired by the national frame but adapted to local needs. For example, in the mountainous province of Bayan-Ulgii, where the branch works with Kazakh communities it does so in Kazakh language and in ways that take account of local religious and cultural protocols. Each year Bayan-Ulgii branch also arranges a local resource mobilisation drive in schools, called “Full box of love”, seeking donations of non-food items (tooth-paste, tooth-brushes, stationary, pencils, clothing) which are passed on to families living in vulnerability. Since 2015, in another part of the country, Dornod branch has been working with kindergartens to introduce children to the world of ‘caring and first aid’. Children are engaged in conversations about how to respond if a family member or a pet were to become unwell. The branch has also supported kindergartens with improving hygiene, including upgrading latrines and providing hand-washing education.

“Mid-level branches are working with grassroots people. They work with local government also closely, especially regarding registration of new people coming from countryside. The branches check, are the people able to access social services? When the branches are able to fund for food distributions, the branch are the first people to distribute. So, as a Red Cross, we need to know who are the most vulnerable. Mid-level branches are helping countryside people who don’t have urban registration documents. Those people cannot get social services. So mid-level branches help on those issues. Because those people don’t know how to collect the papers and how to apply.”

Ms. Purevjav
Board Member
Mongolia Red Cross

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

“Yes, we do have all the members. Well, there is a guideline for the board members, one to be from government, youth, volunteer, special member. These are fixed. We are guided to create diversity. When looking at the ratio of women and men, in MRCS many women are strong and present. Our mid-level branch managers are almost 60% women and HQ staff are also 60% women.”

The National Society has been creating awareness about diversity and inclusion through its policies, recruitment practices, and internal and external communications. As a result of this work, the National Society has witnessed an increase in the diversity of its board members and employees at headquarter level and to some extent in branches. However, there is more work to be done in branches in terms of increasing the diversity of members, volunteers and employees.

COVID-19 RESPONSE AT BRANCH LEVEL

“During the Covid-19, the Red Cross was the initial organisation, first responder that organised public concerts through the media, television (Mongol HDTV) and all stars and singers and political persons involved in online concerts and raised a good amount of funds and distributed 5572 food packages and improved coal to vulnerable households affected Covid -19.”

MRCS's pandemic response is focused on awareness campaigns, especially around prevention, relief and social assistance. Its work in infection prevention and control is helping to reduce the burden of disease on health facilities. The National Society is also supporting people in quarantine and has distributed more than 22,000 food parcels and 2500 hygiene kits to families most impacted economically. MRCS estimates that it has so far reached 96,000 individuals through its Covid-19 humanitarian activities.

“With the support of International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Australian, Korean and Chinese Red Cross Societies, Asian Football Federation, other organizations and communities, we've raised 3.1 billion MNT in donations to prevent and prepare for the spread of Coronavirus and have provided humanitarian assistance to 96,000 people of 22,420 households.”



BRANCH ACCOUNTABILITY

MRCs branch performance monitoring comprises a range of touch points. These include:

- Branch annual plan and implementation report
- Execution of branch performance agreement
- Branch narrative report
- Training report
- Branch performance checklist
- Branch sustainable development criteria

The reports submitted by branches form the basis for the provision of support from headquarter teams and also inform branch to branch support initiatives.

Mid-level branch annual performance review sheet

_____АЙМАГ, ДҮҮРГИЙН УЛААН ЗАГАЛМАЙН ДУНД ШАТНЫ ХОРООНЫ

ДАРГА_____НИЙНХ 2020 ОНЫ ГЭРЭЭГ ДҮГНЭХ ХУУДАС

2021 оны 1 дүгээр сарын _____-ны өдөр

ДД	ҮЗҮҮЛЭЛТ	АВБАЛ ЗОХИХ ОНОО	АВСАН ОНОО
1	Ерөнхий нарийн бичгийн даргатай байгуулсан гэрээний биелэлт	10	
2	Дунд шатны хорооны тогтвортой хөгжлийн үзүүлэлтийг хангасан байдал	20	
3	Ёс зүйн журмын хэрэгжилт	5	
4	Гишүүнчлэлийн хураамж төвлөрүүлсэн байдал\Цаг үеийн үйл ажиллагаа\	10	
5	Хөрөнгө арвижуулах, орлого нэмэгдүүлэх чиглэлээр ажилласан байдал	10	
6	Санхүүгийн менежментийн асуудал \ Санхүүгийн журам, холбогдох хуулийг мөрдөж ажилласан, тайлан, тэнцлийг цаг хугацаанд нь гаргаж, ирүүлсэн байдал\	10	
7	Нигүүлсэл сэтгүүлийн захиалгын байдал	5	
8	Ерөнхий нарийн бичгийн даргын газраас зохион байгуулсан сургалт, нэгдсэн арга хэмжээнд оролцсон байдал \сургалт, туршлага солилцох уулзалт гэх мэт\	5	

RESULT OF BRANCH DEVELOPMENT

“It is amazing actually, it has really changed a lot, we do serve the public now. We also improved staff working conditions. Fundraising has been improved a lot.

Now branches have more discipline. Audit recommendations have been implemented in the branches.”

Ms Purevjav

Board Member
Mongolia Red Cross

The National Society reports the following results arising from its branch development efforts:

- Greater autonomy of branches and greater participation of branches in national level decision making.
- Improved public image of MRCS at branch level. Before 2014, fundraising was very challenging. However, at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic MRCS' fundraising campaign raised US\$199,000 within three and half hours, a major achievement for the National Society.
- More discipline within branches in terms of financial management.
- Improved volunteer management systems and the provision of insurance for employees and volunteers, although this is associated with specific projects and not yet sustainable outside funded projects.
- More locally led services.
- Now well known for supporting vulnerable herders.
- Increased capacity building initiatives led by branches in support of other branches.
- A wider suite of useful policies and guidelines to support governance, management and service delivery at branch level.





REMAINING CHALLENGES IN BRANCH DEVELOPMENT

The most common challenges highlighted during the 2019 BOCA round included:

- Safety and Security
- Infrastructure
- Budgeting and cost efficiency
- Records and archives management

The National Society wants to continue to increase the scale of its activities through locally-designed and resourced activities, to strengthen relationships with local authorities, to diversify its resource mobilisation at all levels, to establish better safety and security for members, volunteers, youth and employees. It will also be addressing the other challenges highlighted in the 2019 BOCA process.

LOOKING AHEAD

We leave the last word to Mme Bolormaa, the Secretary General of the Mongolia Red Cross.

"The most important thing is to support the mid-level branch development to ensure the sustainability and strengthen the capacity of the National Society. Mid-level branch has a key role to play in expanding Red Cross members and supporters and strengthening the broad network of volunteers. We aim to strengthen the capacity of the mid-level branch to reduce social vulnerability, disaster prevention, preparedness, response, public health, blood donation, and the involvement of children and youth in humanitarian action.

The capacity of the mid-level branch is assessed every two years and a special plan is developed to address the weaknesses. Special attention has been paid to human resource development, and specialized, step-by-step training and experience sharing meetings have been organized for mid-level branch managers, staffs, volunteers, and board members.

Due to Mongolia's vast territory, it is divided into six regions on a territorial basis, which are mutually supportive at the regional and inter-regional levels. We have implemented a joint project with the Japanese Red Cross to support the mid-level branches' income generation and fundraising activities. This project was very efficient for branch development.

A model of cooperation with local governments in the framework of humanitarian programs is being developed. One of the key indicators for the development of the mid-level branch is transparency and accountability. The more transparent and accountable we are, the more we can gain the support and trust of the government, the public and the people."



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