

S-23 My role - as the leader of tomorrow

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I am a foreign student from Mongolia living and studying in Hokkaido, Japan. I always wanted to discover this mysterious land and get a deep insight into the real Japanese culture. Little did I know that I would be studying in a Graduate School in Japan majoring in Environmental Science. Hokkaido University offers series of excellent programs and courses.

Center for Sustainability Science (CENSUS) of my university gives me a unique opportunity with its Sustainability Leaders and Masters programs. The courses are designed for international and Japanese graduate students from different backgrounds and majors, who wish to attain sustainable future and solve the global environmental issues through active participation and cooperation. Sustainability issues are related to interdisciplinary science, which makes the environment of CENSUS perfect for gathering of the experts from different fields.

The staff and the professors made a great job with the facilitation and made it possible to connect not only with each other but also including 5 other campuses of 5 different countries. We can have discussions with each other just like we're sitting in the same room. It is also an amazing way to learn, share ideas and get to know about different stories and perspectives of people from places that are completely different than your own. It makes learning more fun, interesting but also challenges you to perform better. Another great thing about the program is that you get to learn in English.

We do share similar problems and concerns about the environmental issues all over the world especially in urban settlements, but some stories are unique and relevant to only certain areas and places. I would like to share some of the problems that my country is facing.

Mongolia – From Nomadic Herders to City Dwellers

Mongolia is the homeland of 3.1 million Mongolians. Our ancestors once created the largest empire in the world “The Great Mongol Empire,” ruled by Chinggis Khaan whose name brought fright, as well as admiration, to all who heard it. One of the world's oldest nomadic tribes is still living in the widespread grasslands of Mongolia.

Changing of Lifestyle

Mongolian nomads have preserved their lifestyle for centuries. But now the conditions are becoming more difficult and it is becoming harder to continue their traditional way of living. Due to the environmental impacts of climate change, such as droughts in the summer, desertification, and severe winters called “dzud,” nomadic herders whose lives depend on raising livestock are facing many challenges. The number of people who are seeking better education and health care, modern comfortable living, and better “opportunities” is increasing day by day. Today, the capital city Ulaanbaatar is home to 1.1 million people, equivalent to one third of the country's population (NSO, 2010). However, nomadic lifestyle is not

suitable for the city lifestyle. Therefore, unexpected and complex problems arise.

How does a country rich in cultural heritage, beautiful sacred lands, and huge deposits of natural resources successfully transition from a nomadic lifestyle into the modern era without harming their precious land and resources? How do traditionally nomadic people adapt to a city lifestyle, and how does a city adapt to them?

From Nomadic Herders to Urban Garbage Scavengers

Most of the people coming to urban areas are seeking a better lifestyle. In reality, the situation isn't what they desire. Starting with finding a place to live, then what to do for work, and finally a place to work, they face many unanticipated hardships. The most common scenario shows that herders sell their livestock, migrate to urban areas, and find a place in the yurt (Mongolian traditional house) district to build their yurt and surrounding fence. A few of the most common jobs for ex-herders are: a taxi driver, where they buy the cheapest car they can find and use it as a taxi, working at black markets, and the least desired job--garbage scavengers, where they collect recyclable materials directly from the streets and landfill sites. Like any other developing South-East Asian country, the problem of overflowing trash is everywhere in the cities.

Air Pollution – Killing Softly

According to a recent study by The World Health Organization, Mongolians in the capital city are breathing some of the world's most hazardous air. Ulaanbaatar has the world's second highest air pollution level, after Iran's Ahwaz (Walsh, 2011). Burning wood and coal for heat and cooking in the yurt districts, emissions from cars, electric plants, and industry are the biggest contributors to the air pollution. According to Worldbank.org, "High levels of particulates and other pollutants are responsible for increased health risks - indicated by the increasing number of children under the age of five suffering from respiratory diseases" (2011). While trying to hide all the flaws from our eyes, the

great smog of Ulaanbaatar city has swallowed everything from our sights.

"Minegolia"

Mongolia is a land that has been blessed with many natural resources. Recently, many outside investors have wanted to capitalize on these resources. "OT"—Oyu Tolgoi, or "Turquoise Hill" is the site of the biggest foreign-investment project in Mongolia, a copper-and-gold mine that is springing up at a remarkable speed and is expected, by 2020, to account for one-third of Mongolia's GDP. Next in line is Tavan Tolgoi (Five Hills), the world's biggest untapped coal deposit, also in South Gobi province (The Economist, 2012). But the promise of economic growth comes with huge sacrifices that are hidden behind the proposed outcome. Mongolia a relatively dry country with no access to the ocean and relies heavily on its groundwater. This new mining activity will most likely increase the scarcity of water in Mongolia, which can make it more vulnerable to climate changes and overgrazing of the grasslands.

Brain Drain

Many Mongolians these days, especially youngsters from the capital city, are willing to leave the country for a better life and more opportunities. They go to prestigious schools abroad, gain experience from developed countries and settle in those countries. Solongo Alгаа writes "Since 1990 Mongolian people have started enjoying their freedoms and travelled abroad extensively. The socio-economic situation in Mongolia; unemployment, low remunerations and income are the primary factors contributing to international migration" (2007). The most skilled and talented people go abroad and for the sake of their futures decide to stay in developed countries. Also, the remaining traces of socialism and bureaucracy are some of the difficulties that citizens are facing. In Mongolia it is hard to achieve great things without any political or bureaucratic burdens. These are some of the sad but true facts that discourage people from introducing new revolutionary ideas to further Mongolian society.

In order to make a fundamental change in the society, first of all you have to start with yourself. Learning about the situation and all the causes, exploring and discovering all the alternative solutions to your problem are the essentials, but a good idea that's not shared with others is just another tragedy. To share with this good idea and make it into a great one, you should spread it and lead other people to reach the most favorable result. The Sustainability Leaders program allows me to get a holistic image of the overall situation that we are facing, and lets us think beyond the borders in order to be more creative and skillful for finding the best approaches to these problems. In other words, it is the best place for me to prepare myself as the leader of tomorrow.