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Building hope for a Mongolian community through savings, alliances and innovation

When the Technical College of Darkhan, led by a British professor, worked on an experimental straw house project with JCS (Joint Christian Services) International in 2000, little did the institution know that the partnership would lead to the growth of Habitat for Humanity Mongolia. JCS is an association of Christian organizations involved in agriculture, education, health and business development projects in Mongolia.

In 2001, when HFH Mongolia was looking to start a building program in Darkhan, 200 kilometers northwest of the capital Ulaanbaatar, its search led to a meeting with the director of the Technical College. The college's collaboration with JCS attracted HFH Mongolia to work with them, and a steering committee comprised of local volunteers and headed by the Technical College's director was formed in April 2002.

Construction Begins

In October 2002, the steering committee built its first house in Darkhan, made with blocks made of ash waste, with a family in need who was living in a ger community. Gers are round tents that traditionally house Mongolians and their extended families. Ger communities are overcrowded and often lack access to basic services such as heating, water and sanitation.

The affiliate's vision is in line with Darkhan city's own strategic plan. The plan for the second-largest city in Mongolia calls for improvements of living conditions in ger communities and the development of human resources capable of meeting existing and future labor market requirements.

It helps that the affiliate enjoys a good relationship with the local government, which bore most of the land and infrastructure costs for Habitat's projects. From 2003 to 2005, the local government provided land for a total of 130 families. The local governor's office continued its support by installing an electricity line and starting bus services for the new community.

To date, the Darkhan affiliate has built 80 houses and renovated nine homes. Over the past four years, the affiliate has also harnessed local broadcast networks to air 10- to 15-minute television programs about Habitat's work in Mongolia.

Small Industry Brings Hope

The Darkhan affiliate is concerned about sustainable livelihood for impoverished communities. Under its initiative, a concrete block-making unit was set up in 2003. The affiliate invited home partner families to work for pay in the unit. As these families had been lagging in repaying their Habitat housing

mortgage loans, their earnings helped put them back on track.

The concrete block-making unit produced more than 16,000 blocks, which were used to build 27 houses. The additional incomes generated led to an increase in mortgage repayments to 92 percent. The repayment rate for the other two Mongolian affiliates is an average of 70 to 80 percent.

Darkhan was the first Mongolian affiliate to hold a “Leaders Build.” Nineteen local leaders, including corporate heads, government representatives, pastors and school principals, participated in this event, which was held in conjunction with a Global Village volunteer team, a group of Habitat volunteers from overseas.

Beyond Housing

The completion of houses, however, does not signal the end of Habitat’s work for the Darkhan affiliate. Its partnerships are a mark of its desire to further develop the community in which it builds houses. For instance, the affiliate collaborated with the British Embassy in 2005 to provide 65 people with a water well for constant access to drinking water. Earlier, in 2003 and 2004, the affiliate worked with a Lutheran mission from Norway to provide five families with ecosan (ecological sanitation) toilets and to help 20 families to grow vegetable gardens.

The Darkhan affiliate plays an active role in carrying out Habitat’s mission in Mongolia, serving needy families in partnership with the local government, corporations and the media through innovative programs.



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Contact

Peter Witton, Director of Communications, Asia-Pacific
pwitton@habitat.org

