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## Preface

I am pleased and honored to introduce *Women in Mongolia: Mapping Progress under Transition*, a UNIFEM report on the experiences of the women of Mongolia in the context of the political and economic transformation of their country. There are a number of important reasons to celebrate the launch of this publication:

First, the publication represents an inspiring example of the way in which strong partnerships between Governments, women's groups and the UN can lead to action for the advancement of gender equality at the national level. The idea of mapping progress of Mongolian women in the transition sprang from a series of discussions held on the occasion of my visit to the country in 1999 at the invitation of the Government of Mongolia. The call for my visit was in itself a signal of the seriousness of the Government of Mongolia to address the needs of women. My consultations with Government and NGO representatives focused on the opportunities and challenges for implementing the Beijing Platform for Action, with a view to identifying concrete ways in which UNIFEM could support the Government commitment to the Mongolian National Programme for the Advancement of Women (NPAW). Our meetings culminated in a mutual commitment to work jointly towards strengthening economic security for women, developing new political leadership and representation of women in decision-making, and increasing protection of women's human rights through a review of legal frameworks and the justice system. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was subsequently signed between UNIFEM and the Government of Mongolia, formalizing our commitments and setting the stage for the development of this report.

Second, *Women in Mongolia: Mapping Progress under Transition* was elaborated through a genuine consultative process between the women of Mongolia, the Government and the UN system in the country. UNIFEM is especially gratified that the report strongly builds on our own efforts to develop new tools of accountability for gender equality in collaboration with governments and civil society. More specifically, the publication represents the first national-level response to the findings and recommendations contained in UNIFEM's global report, *Progress of the World's Women 2000*, launched on the occasion of the UN General Assembly Special Session in June 2000, Beijing +5. This report takes our work further by analysing the impact of the policies of transition upon women in Mongolia, identifying specific needs and charting priorities for action.

The findings contained in *Women in Mongolia: Mapping Progress under Transition* demonstrate that women's gains in past years have eroded since the transition in a number of areas. For instance, women's profile has increased among the unemployed while it has declined sharply in terms of political representation. While the costs of privatization have been felt by both women and men, albeit in different ways, the benefits have yet to reach women to the extent they have men. The report points to the links between women's greater job loss, higher unemployment and the increase in female-headed households living below the poverty line since 1990.

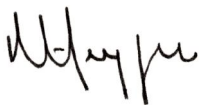
In addition, the reports finds that economic "shock therapy" in Mongolia has driven women into the informal sector where they must cope with greater income and health insecurities. Women in the rural areas face the greatest challenge as the decline of industry has forced families to depend on agriculture, particularly livestock

herding. Increased demand for labour in herding households obliges women to spend more hours in productive work while also taking on greater responsibilities for domestic and care work, owing to the sharp reduction of public expenditures on social services.

Identifying the challenges facing Mongolian women in the context of the economic transition is a first critical step towards designing effective responses. The report contains numerous recommendations, touching upon all spheres of women's lives. On the issue of violence against women, for example, while NGOs have become increasingly active, legislative frameworks are not in place and corresponding government action to protect the rights of women needs to be strengthened. The report emphasizes passage of a draft law on domestic violence and strengthening of the law enforcement and judicial systems as immediate priorities. In the case of women's economic activities, the report concludes that women have responded to the cashmere export market opportunities by taking up herding of cashmere goats and processing of cashmere hair. It recommends a full study of women's participation in this particular sector, as a potential entry point for policy and programme interventions for women's economic empowerment. It also highlights the importance of developing a national system to produce sex-disaggregated data that can shed light on the gender disparities across all areas covered by the report, including education, health, governance and women's rights. The need to build local expertise to analyse the data and propose gender-sensitive policy options is also emphasized.

As a follow-up to the findings of this report, UNIFEM is looking forward to assisting the Government of Mongolia in its review of the NPAW to ensure that it corresponds to the realities of Mongolian women's lives. An effort is also being made to build the local expertise for mainstreaming the priorities of the NPAW into the Action Programme of the Government, and strengthening capacity to identify indicators and collect sex-disaggregated data for monitoring. The report's findings are also expected to help strengthen coordination mechanisms of multilateral agencies such as the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) as well as bilateral and NGO programmes.

It is my hope that completion of this study heralds a new phase in the transition process, one where women will no longer bear a disproportionate burden of economic hardship nor be denied equal access to the benefits of emerging economic opportunities. The commitment and initiative of the Government of Mongolia and the civil society that it represents should serve as an example for other countries seeking to reverse the adverse impact of the transition on women. UNIFEM is honoured to be an active partner to these efforts and we remain committed to facilitating and lending our technical expertise towards advancing gender equality in Mongolia.



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