

Advancing health in the workplace in Mongolia

The MCA (Millennium Challenge Account)-Mongolia Health Project “Prevention and Control of Major Non-Communicable Diseases and Injuries (NCDIs)” is a 5-year project financed by the Millennium Challenge Corporation. The project’s short-term objective is to increase access to information and services about NCDIs. The project’s long-term objective is to increase the adoption of behaviours which aim to reduce NCDIs among target populations and improve medical treatment and control of NCDIs with the final objective to increase the productive lives of Mongolians. The priorities identified for the project are hypertension, type II diabetes, breast and cervical cancer, smoking and drinking amongst youth, myocardial infarction (MI), stroke and injuries related to road traffic accidents.

Following the World Health Organization (WHO) settings approach, which acknowledges the workplace as a key setting for promoting health, and recognizing that the working population spends most of their time in the workplace, initiatives have been undertaken to introduce the concept of workplace health promotion to contribute to healthy workplaces and a decrease in NCDIs. The four main risk factors targeted are physical inactivity, unhealthy nutrition and salt consumption, smoking, and alcohol abuse. The Workplace Health Promotion component of the project focuses on guiding employers and employee representatives to create healthier workplaces through technical assistance, resources and financial assistance via a small grants programme. Twenty-nine Mongolian companies/institutions

benefited from the MCA-Mongolia grant programme funding with a total amount of 387,320 USD allocated for the implementation of workplace health promotion.

Workplace health promotion - a new concept in Mongolia

Workplace health promotion (WHP) is a new concept in Mongolia and only a small number of companies have been proactively investing in the health of their employees so far. Many enterprises are still struggling to implement occupational health and safety systems, which is especially important in a country, where many workplaces are in mining and related industries. An ordinance of the Ministry of Health on the “Selection criteria and procedures of health promoting workplaces” was issued in 1996 to stimulate the development of organizations that promote well-being at work. The ordinance was amended and re-approved in 2002 and 2009 as the selections of health promoting workplaces began to be carried out at national and local levels. Nowadays, the title of *Health Promoting Workplace* has been issued to 25 organizations at the national level and 450 organizations at local levels which is a low indicator in terms of quantity. While the MCA-Mongolia project has mostly been focusing on the personal resources of employees with regard to improving the aforementioned risk factors, it has also been advocating a more comprehensive healthy workplace approach, which follows the World Health Organization Healthy Workplace framework.

Initially, the MCA-Mongolia Health Project launched a series of dialogues and discussions between various local business companies, government and non-government organizations on creating a healthy workplace. An assessment of the situation with regards to WHP was conducted among 36 companies and institutions and results were presented to a wider audience comprising the participants and other stakeholders. Afterwards a comprehensive toolkit for workplace health promotion was created drawing on different best practice tools and the overarching guidance of the WHO Healthy Workplace Framework. Support is given to companies and institutions on an ongoing basis in applying those tools. In addition, a number of training activities (training of trainers (ToT), regional training, workshops and seminars) were held to further knowledge and skills in workplace health promotion programming.

Creating a sustainable infrastructure: the Mongolian Network for Health-Promoting Workplaces

One of the highlights of the workplace component of the MCA-Mongolia Health Project was the establishment of the Mongolian National Network for Health Promoting Workplaces in 2011. At the end of 2011, a strategic planning workshop was devoted to the formulations

Mongolia



- most sparsely populated independent country in the world with a population of around 2.75 million people
- 30% of the population are Nomads
- recent discovery of extensive mineral deposits has led to a booming mining sector
- mining accounts for 22% of GDP (agriculture 16%)
- average life expectancy is 68.5 years
- 27.6% of the population smoke*
- prevalence of hypertension is 27.3%*
- 39.8% of the population is overweight and 12.5% is obese*

*Mongolian STEPS Survey on Prevalence of NCDI and Risk Factors – 2009



The 1st National Forum on Workplace Health Promotion in Ulanbataar, 4–5 December 2012

of vision, mission and goal of the network as well as on the identification of the strategy in a participatory way. A Steering Committee (SC) was elected by workshop participants, which since meets monthly to discuss and organize the activities of the network. The SC has three working groups: 1) Capacity Building; 2) Information Dissemination & Advocacy, and 3) Resource Mobilization. Initially a network strategy, action plan, and detailed work plan for each SC group were developed, discussed and approved in the meetings. The SC also created a Monitoring and Evaluation Group (auditing committee). Key stakeholders in further strengthening the role and influence of the network are the Mongolian National Chamber of Commerce & Industry (MNCCI), Federation for Mongolian Human Resource Management, the Trade Union Federation and the Mongolian Employer Federation. The MCA-Mongolia Health Project is providing support through an advisory group with participation of MCA-Mongolia Project Implementation Unit (PIU), WHO, Government Implementing Agency, Department of Health (GIA DoH), Ministry of Health (MoH), and the institutional contractor EPOS Health Management. Network members were further trained in workplace health promotion through a regional training programme. Ongoing support is provided with regard to raising funds for the network in order to sustain it after the project ends.

The Network sub-committees have been up to now successfully established in four

provinces (Khentii, Dornod, Sukhbaatar and Bayankhongor aimags). The sub-committees also collaborate with other healthy settings, such as kindergartens, schools and hospitals. All sub-committees encourage their members to become health-promoting workplaces. By the end of 2012, a total of 374 members have registered for the Mongolian Network for Workplace Health Promotion: 211 from aimags [administrative subdivision] and 163 from Ulaanbaatar.

So far three newsletters have been developed by the Network SC and EPOS Health Management staff and sent to all members of the National WHP Network by e-mail. The newsletters were also uploaded on the project website (www.ncdi.mn), which has a special subsection for network members. In September 2012, a study tour on workplace health promotion was organized by MCA-Mongolia Health Project to the USA for 15 participants. In December 2012, the first National Forum on Workplace Health Promotion was held in Ulaanbaatar hosted by the MNCCI. The participating stakeholders and interested parties discussed how to further advance workplace health promotion in Mongolia and agreed on a set of national and organizational recommendations.

Leading the way - good practice examples

The “Healthy Railway Worker” programme was launched and approved by the **Railway Authority** in 2011 and specifies dedicated funding until 2014. The Locomotive Depot

at Ulaanbaatar Railway Junction was selected to develop a health promotion programme and become an example for other sites and units to follow. The Healthy Railway Worker programme places emphasis on the screening of risk factors and health education seminars. After assessing risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCD) by general practitioners, a health screening schedule for workers of 34 railway sites in the central region was developed and approved for 2011. So far, machinists of the locomotive depot and employees working at Railway unit II, the UB railway station, and the electricity delivery unit for the railway were screened and tested to establish fitness levels. Some 90%, or 1097 of a total of 1222 employees, participated in the screening. The outcomes of the screenings were summarized and presented to each enterprise. As a follow-up, training on risk factors for NCDs was conducted with the assistance of the Department of Training at the National Public Health Centre. Some 535 employees from the four enterprises attended the training in 2011.

In addition, a ToT programme was organized for the directors and training officers of the 34 railway sites as well as for the medical doctors working at four health centres along the railway. The Railway Hospital has been running the “Improving Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Railway Employees about NCDs” programme, which has attracted approximately 100 employees to the educational sessions.

Additional seminars were held on:

- Risk factors for NCDs (alcohol, tobacco, lack of exercise, nutrition and stress) for 130 employees at Zuunkharaa;
- 110 employees with diabetes at sanatorium of locomotive depot were educated about foot care, nutrition and healthy practices;
- Smoke-free and alcohol-free environment campaigns for feldshers (healthcare professionals) of Bagakhangai and Baganuur Locomotive Depots. 10 workers quit smoking as a result.

Newtel Co. Ltd is a company which provides services for Mobicom Corporation, the leading cell phone operator in Mongolia, and has successfully been running health promoting workplace activities since it started business in 2000. The company is one of the biggest employers in Mongolia and is coordinated by 10 members of an administra-

tion team from 9 agencies, working to provide 170 types of services to the customers, nationwide through 10,000 retailers and 50 local branches and centres in Ulaanbaatar city with support of 200 part-time employees and 560 permanent employees. Overall, 87.6% of all employees of the company are younger than 35 years.

In August 2009, the company officially employed a physician who provides free primary health care and consultations for the employees, as well as conducts health screenings for all employees with the cooperation of private health centres. Employees who had been identified via the screening with specific health problems are supervised by the physician through regular check-ups and receive rehabilitation services as well as medical care. Last year the company conducted health screenings for all employees with the cooperation of a private health centre. The company organizes annual health promotion activities in May and allocates 35,000 tugrik for each employee. A contract was established with an organization, which provides activities such as swimming, aqua fitness, dance, yoga, meditation and fitness as proposed by the Newtel employees. Last year the group opened the fitness centre "Hearty" at the TEDY centre and employees and their family members may use the centre for a 35% discount of the regular fee. The programme includes a number of different activities:

- Quarterly health seminars which are organized through online teaching and in classrooms on different topics such as the prevention of non-communicable diseases, risky behaviours, healthy diet and physical activity. These are taught by physicians and specialists with degrees in medical sciences. For example, the training on "First aid for emergencies" with cooperation of Red Cross, Mongolia was attended by 150 employees.
- Employees take part in sports clubs, e.g. tennis, basketball, football, badminton, or a club for healthy nutrition. Regular sport competitions are organized among all employees and promoted by the company with all employees actively participating in these competitions.
- Most employees in the company have sedentary jobs and therefore some of the young employees of the company installed software for physical activity at workplace, which was initially developed by the National Centre for Health Development



Employees engage in desk-side exercises at Newtel.

ment to prevent problems from physical inactivity and maintain and support their health. The software was set up for all computers of the employees in the offices. Employees exercise at their desks every day at 11:00 and 16:00.

Groundbreaking research on health and productivity

A highly interesting research study on the "Adverse effects of temporary disabilities on productivity and performance" was recently conducted by Bolormaa Byambajav (Steering Committee member) of the Social Insurance Division of Bulgan Aimag. The study found steady growth in the number of the recipients of temporary disability allowances among the employees of the agencies and entities of Bulgan aimag in 2009–2011. The average period of 12.6 days of temporary disability per insurance holder resulted in employers paying 20 million MNT in total and the social insurance fund spending 37.4 million MNT in 2011 totalling 57.4 million MNT. The study concluded that there is a significant opportunity in decreasing the financial and service costs incurred by employers due to temporary disabilities through comprehensive workplace health promotion programming. It was recommended further research be conducted to document the negative cost impact of ill-health, if possible, on a national scale.

Accomplishments and knowledge acquired

The five-year MCA-Mongolia Health Project has made significant progress with regard to raising awareness of the business value of investing in the health of employees and of existing strategies and tools in workplace

health promotion. In particular, the establishment of the Mongolian National Network as well as the involvement of the MN-NCI can be considered a success as these two organizations will play a key role in sustaining the advancements made by the MCA-Mongolia Health Project.

Much work still needs to be done to create truly healthy work environments and improve the health of Mongolian employees beyond the completion of the MCA-Mongolia Health Project in September of this year. It is highly recommended that the following principles are kept in mind:

- It is essential to follow an intersectoral approach and involve all relevant stakeholders, especially more bridges need to be built between the private sector and government agencies.
- The Mongolian National WHP Network needs to be further strengthened as a forum of sharing and discussion of challenges and good practices; to achieve this relationship with an established organization should be explored.
- Workplace health promotion programmes should follow an integrated and comprehensive approach aligned with the WHO Healthy Workplace framework (which covers four main components: physical work environment, psychosocial work environment, personal health resources and enterprise-community involvement).

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