

Present Activities of the MWLA

1999-2000

The last three years has been one of the most productive periods for the Mongolian Women Lawyers Association (MWLA). During this period, the MWLA has been implementing its main goals and several projects as well. Since our Association has received from the Global Fund for Women the grant for the organizational support, we were able to make a considerable contribution in empowering women lawyers' social activities and in protecting violated rights of many women through different activities such as:

1. With the purpose to accomplish extended activities to improve legal education of our members and women society organized several workshops have been conducted by our own efforts:

- From December 1999 - to March 2000 in collaboration with the National Center against Violence - conducted a series of workshops throughout several provinces on the right to work as part of the commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the UN Declaration on Human Rights.
- in June 23-28, 1999 in collaboration with the *Asia Pacific Women - Law and Development* (Thailand) - National Training in Ulaanbaatar on Feminist Legal Theory”
- Two stages of 3 months English classes for our staff and some members
- Series of workshops on “Social insurance system and pension, The Family Law”
- Numerous reports, speeches and lectures on different national and international workshops /in Croatia, Argentina, Canada, Philippines, S.Korea, Malaysia, Hungary/ and seminars conducted by other NGOs and governmental and foreign organizations. The example of lectures and reports are: “Gender and the Law”, “Gender Statistics and Policy Planning”, “Role of Human Rights’ Ombudsman in Mongolia”, “Activities of Women NGOs, Family Violence and its Legal Regulation”, ‘Overview of Domestic Violence in Mongolia and so on.
- We have legal columns in such nation-wide daily and weekly newspapers like *Udriin sonin* (Daily news), *Zuunii medee* (Century news), *Humuus* (People) though which legal information is provided for public and questions addressed to MWLA are answered.
- Preparation and publication of handouts and training materials. 10 handouts related to the labor and social welfare regulations were prepared and distributed for free of charge and used in training.
- Broadcasting of legal advice on the *Mongolian Radio* channel once a week gave incredible feedback and due to this a number of our clients has increased significantly. This broadcasting was nominated the “Best Radio-Broadcast of 1999”.
- supported by the UNFPA in Ulaanbaatar, research on “Reproductive health and the Law” has been completed and the final report of it shall be published as hard copy book in fall 2000.
- GFW’s grants allows us to be more flexible in achieving our goals and supporting public initiatives and needs such as lobbying women candidates, women NGO’s coalition activities within the frame of our mission.

1. Within the Program of providing policy advocacy:

- We succeeded in initiating and drafting a bill of "The Law against Domestic Violence". It was submitted to the Parliament and we have great expectation for its fastest enactment because a member of our Board Ms.Dolgor was elected to the new Parliament on July 2, 2000.
- In cooperation with UN Human Right's Sub-commission in Mongolia a bill on "The Law on Human Right's Commission" was drafted and lobbied for.
- during the election campaign in June-July of 2000 we supported women candidates by recalling political parties to nominate women. Due to this collaborative effort of Women NGOs, 8 women became MPs, 4 of which have previous NGO background. Our local branches have made considerable contribution in this campaign. The same actions are planned for election campaign of local governments which shall be held in Sept, 2000.

2. Within the Program of providing direct legal services:

The Legal advice center /LAC/ has been working to fulfill its objectives which is to be a "reliable advisor/helper" by mean of coordinating advocates and providing legal assistance and individual counseling. The Center has one staff legal advisor/councilor working full time and five volunteer lawyers who come once a week at a scheduled time.

Individual counseling

- Counseling was provided for 539 individuals. As for the problem types, there were social welfare, pension and tax issues, labor disputes, domestic violence cases, property and apartment disputes, and so on. To illustrate a tremendous process which is behind of each such a case here is a distinct example: An unemployed woman X lived with her 15 years old daughter in an apartment rented from the organization where her late husband, feeder of the family, used to work. Property manager sued against her and managed to win the case in the court on reason of chronical delay of rent payment so that he became able to deal with a new rent-seeker Y. With the assistance of our legal councilor the decision of the lower court was appealed and objected and rent rights were restored. However, the new rent-seeker Y disagreed with this court decision by bitterly beating X and her daughter which resulted in X's broken fingers and serious damage to her daughter's eyesight so she had to stop attending school. Again with our help she brought the suit to the court after hearing of which she got established her retirement pension and pension for loss of a bread-winner. Besides, we had a "godmother" to be found for X's daughter via channels of the *Chistina Noble* Foundation in Mongolia. That mother sent to X's daughter new special eyeglasses, which were not available here, from S.Korea. Currently, we are helping X to get through a court a compensation for physical damage from Y, and her daughter will start schooling again next fall.
- Individual counseling was provided to 34 clients in order to regularize activities at the Legal office of 8 counties of several district in Ulaanbaatar which organized Crime prevention campaign.
- For pre-trial and trial representation, the LAC coordinated advocates for 112 clients who challenged their cases at police and courts of which 89 women were represented free of charge.

Legal education and training provided free of charge

- for secondary and high school students - 11 training on orientation for legal profession, child rights, child labor rights, right to study, reproductive rights and social welfare were organized
- for industry and business sector's workers - LAC organized 15 training sessions on employment, social welfare, family, and domestic violence issues for 21 trade union leaders, 78 railway road construction workers, 165 energy service workers and 250 women from 6 locomotive team; 261 APU factory workers. Totally 775 people were involved.
- for county governors - LAC organized 12 training sessions on social welfare for 81 county governors
- for district Government staff in charge for women and children issue -organized 8 training sessions on women rights, child rights, minors employment issue, family law for 43 district inspectors

4. Within the Program on Strengthening organizational capability

Internally:

- Internal rules and articles of MWLA, duties and responsibilities of each position were reviewed and updated.
- Instructions for Evaluation of 2 years performance were sent to heads of local branches and reports received back. Reports were carefully analyzed to light out our weaknesses, if any, of work in rural areas.

Externally, implementation of projects:

- In late 1997 the International Development Law Institute (IDLI) and MWLA with support of USAID launched a project to enhance the capacity of the Mongolian judiciary with the publication of a "Practical Manual for Judges: The Mongolian Benchbook". In 1998, 1,000 copies of the Benchbook were published in the Mongolian language and one hundred English language copies. The Benchbooks were presented to all the judges of the country through a series of 11 training workshops organized throughout the various provinces and in the capital. An impact evaluation commissioned as part of the project provided evidence of the positive response from the project beneficiaries. Because the first phase of this project was successful, it was extended with financial support of the AusAid.
- April-June 2000 - a project supported by the AusAid which intended to train non-lawyers who are closely working with public and have some capacity to advocate in their communities. This included a wide range of women such as public servants of local governments, teachers and rural businesswomen. Workshops on training of trainers have been completed successfully and the information given on the newly adopted Labor Code and Family Law was very important and useful even for the participant lawyers. Totally 630 non-lawyers were trained in 21 provinces. This project is extended by support of the Netherlands Embassy for Sept-Nov, 2000.
- In June, 2000, we have prepared a project on bringing students of Korean Law schools during their breaks for such voluntary activities like helping with work at juvenile detention centers or improving public schools of poor districts. This project is to be implemented long with Korean Sharing Movement.

- Regarding our external relations: Currently we are engaged in implementation of several projects the last of which will end in Feb.2001. As you may know, funders are interested to collaborate with well-established NGOs as ours also do. This would save for them funding overhead expenses such as salaries or operational costs. That is why our such costs are covered by GFW grants solely. By this moment, international support became a big anticipation for us.
- Our member lawyers, renown in Mongolia and regionally, often receive invitations and announcements for international conferences, workshops, etc. International contacts are useful for us in any way. But due to lack of funds we are not able to support them even in covering parts of their travel expenses. Our staff and members attend such occasions only if expenses are provided by organizers or funders.
- Since a number of people seeking legal help at our organization has increased significantly as our reputation grows, we tend to face a problem of lack of licensed/certificated attorneys which would work as our full time staff. The only full time lawyer working at LAC in UB headquarters is not a licensed attorney who could adequately represent defendants in court trials though she is a truly experienced lawyer and devoted counselor. That is why we feel necessity of hiring new staff attorneys but due to shortage of funds currently we can not fulfill this, that in turn shows up on capacity of our offered services.
- The same is with our local branches which due to absence of proper offices can not render permanent services for local communities. That is why rural women and often our branches themselves address any issues to UB headquarters directly. This slows down our services, communicating with rural women in need and with our local branches as well as increases workload of the staff of headquarters with issues which could be solved locally. Our local branches have no internet connection and e-mailing.
- In spring 2000, the UB headquarters underwent some internal disagreements and the Board conducted replacement of an Executive Director. These changes were appreciated by the rest of members because they disagreed with intransparent way of previous management (a copy of letter of Board to all sponsors and supporters which was sent out in March, 2000 is enclosed).

Our future plans

We will continue to realize of stated mission is to provide legal services to women and engage in policy and other forms of advocacy with other women's groups, increase women's participation in social development, as well as to contribute to the establishment of a legal system that is responsive to the needs and protective of the rights of women. More close and specific plans are:

- New bills of the core laws of Mongolia (Criminal Code, Criminal Procedures Code, Civil Code, etc) were submitted to the Parliament and are on the way of discussion. Working along with government agencies which submitted them and other women's groups, we lobbying for increased gender-sensitization of laws, institutions of law and policy to be responsive to women's issues and concerns; to priority women's issues. We are expecting that the most of our policy advocacy work will be concentrated on this scope.
- We are planning to strengthen our local branches to make them regularly working and with locally hired staff attorneys providing free services. This should serve for disadvantaged rural women and children as well as local communities in whole. Local branches should become able to work with local authorities and judiciary directly at appropriate level. It should be admitted here that Mongolia is a vast but sparsely populated country with herding rural inhabitants, that makes communication (post, air, ground, Internet, TV, etc.) constrained greatly. Living standards in rural areas generally even lower than in cities and while unemployment is higher. This causes very hidden domestic violence and a large wave of migration of the poor to the capital. This means thousands of disadvantaged people, especially single mothers who are not involved in social welfare schemes. These groups, their violated rights will continue to be in our constant attention for coming years.

How the international grant helps the cause of women?

Due to efforts of our Association, their members, and other women NGOs, the Mongolian society got introduced to institutional definition of “domestic violence.” This accomplishment effected in submission of bill of the Law on Domestic Violence and gender sensitization of work of judiciary and law enforcement authorities. Many hundreds of disadvantaged women and their children received free legal services which sometimes even sustained their lives. Upon our training sessions and propaganda via media women community became more familiar with new laws, influencing their lives but frequently changed in the current transition period of Mongolia, and enhanced in protection of their rights.

We believe to have influenced establishment and proper course of fair judiciary in Mongolia after judiciary system was reorganized entirely in early 1990s.

We are open for the collaboration with all organizations with similar to our objection.

