
Mongolian women in geosciences: the appearance and reality of changing gender roles

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Mongolia is emerging as a major new frontier for mineral exploration and development, and one of the fundamental problems arising is the need for a stronger indigenous highly educated geoscience and mining labour pool. However, gender issues present barriers that must be overcome. This presentation will overview the way in which geosciences and mining, in particular, are gendered activities in Mongolia. Mongolia offers an ironic combination in that more young women than young men are entering the field of geosciences, but this is not translating too well into career opportunities for the women. While the presence and activity of women geoscientists in the educational and research institutions is high, many women are facing resistance to their employment by mining companies and other venues for their education and talent. Men are still, by and large, preferred for most jobs. In the last ten years, the proportion of women enrolled in Ph.D. programs has increased from 30% to 50% of total enrollment. The proportion taking leadership roles as chairpersons or deans in educational institutions is 51% whereas only 21% of leadership positions in industry and government are women.

This brief statistical summary highlights both the traditional attitudes regarding the suitability of men and women for gender defined roles and the new emerging effects of political and economic realities that are negatively influencing the education of young men, especially from rural areas. So what on the surface looks like a considerable positive gain for women masks a deeper gendered reality that requires analysis. The maintenance and growth of a healthy and robust geoscientific community in Mongolia requires careful attention to the way in which gender roles are changing. For educated young women geoscientists, the issue is gaining acceptance in what have traditionally been male roles. At a recent conference on Women in Geoscience, co-sponsored by the Canadian International Development Agency and the Mongolian University of Science and Technology in Ulaanbaatar, the Mongolian women founded the Association of Mongolian Women Geoscientists. The Association will work to increase the awareness of gender related issues among relevant individuals and institutions, including mining companies, and to develop strategies for the further integration of women into all spheres of geoscience related research and careers. Likewise, the presentation will at-

tempt to elucidate the challenges and promise associated with the gendered face of geosciences in contemporary Mongolia.