



Mongolian children's reading after the pandemic

I. Background & Rational

Since the COVID 19 pandemic started in Wuhan, China in early December 2019, as a small and vulnerable country neighboring with China, Mongolia started taking measures to prevent a possible outbreak within the country. So, all schools nationwide had been closed since February 2020 and classes were online for students including children in primary and secondary schools. Kindergartens and libraries were also closed for the lengthy period.

Children were staying at home and had less access to books and reading materials especially in remote areas and vulnerable and low-income families. There is still limited Mongolian content online for children especially regarding the quality of children books.

The Ministry of Education has been working on a revised law and regulation for the education sector as quality of the education has been questionable and become very weak nationwide. However, it is targeted to formal education and limited to addressing issues such as children's reading and how it should be supported and promoted. In addition, with the new structure of the Government of Mongolia, library and book affairs have been moved to be under the Ministry of Culture.

With the support of IBBY Yamada Fund, the Mongolian BBY section did organize a policy workshop on children's reading promotion in September 2016. It was very effective and appreciated by the ministry, librarians and authors for promoting children's reading and the quality of children's books in the country. As a result of the project, activities of libraries and their cooperation with publishing houses and support by the Ministry were improved in recent years. And, Mongolian children do read more, and publishers and authors publish more quality books in the market. However, the pandemic causes so negatively to children's reading and their access to books unfortunately especially as schools, kindergartens and libraries were closed during the pandemic .

Observing the negative causes, and huge uncertainties and challenges associated with the pandemic, local libraries reached out to the Mongolian section and requested to organize another policy workshop to discuss and find ways to continue to evolve children's reading in the country. But this time with a more scientific approach and also involvement of key users of children's books in addition to key actors in children's reading promotion.

So, issues to address and support through this project were:

- The need to understand children's reading during the pandemic and its post environment: challenges, opportunities and ways to improve
- The need to have an adjusted and workable policy and actions to be discussed among key actors for children's reading promotion
- The need of some practical solutions and advices to demonstrate all the actors

II. Objectives and key activities of the project

The project aimed to review the current children's reading situation by asking and listening to key users of children's books such as librarians, children and parents etc. and discuss and find improved ways on children's reading in a post pandemic environment by organizing a policy workshop with key actors such as the Ministry of Culture, librarians and promoters etc..

Main activities were followings in four sequential package of actions

- a) Survey and consultations: Learn and listen to concerns and ideas from those who are users of children's books in a post pandemic environment through a survey and also some focus group consultations. Participants in the survey were librarians, children and parents. The activity was organized for June- September 2022.
- b) A note of key findings: Collected all what learned from and responded by the key users, and made an analysis and wrote a summary note and draft recommendations. The activity was done in October 2022.
- c) Policy discussion: Based on the analytical note and draft recommendations, through a policy workshop among key actors, a list of joint recommendations on children's reading promotion in a post pandemic environment has been discussed and developed. And it was communicated with key actors including the Ministry of Culture, the Children's Central (National) Library and libraries at major schools in the capital city. The workshop was conducted on 11 November, 2022.

III. Major outputs and results of the project

The project has been implemented under the leadership of the Children's Central Library of Mongolia and Mongolia BBY section.

a) Survey and consultations

The survey was conducted among three main target groups such as librarians, parents and children.

A questionnaire with 7- 10 questions for each of the three groups was developed, and in total over 250 people representing librarians, parents and children in Ulaanbaatar, the capital city and a few provinces in Mongolia participated in the survey.

During the National Book Day event in Ulaanbaatar in September, some dialogues about the children's reading and survey questions were held to get views and opinions of key users of the children's books.

The survey questions for librarians aimed to get basic but important data of librarians of children's libraries such as their experiences and capacity building needs in addition to the children's reading. The questions for children and parents were mainly about children's reading including what and how often do children read, how they choose books, and how they access reading and services at libraries etc. So, with the survey, we got very helpful data and information about librarians, and children's reading expressed by children, parents and librarians.

b) A note of key findings and recommendations

A note including a list of key findings and recommendations based on responses and findings from the survey has been developed. Key issues included in the note are:

- Reading habits are still quite strong among children
- But access to the quality books and services at libraries, and support from parents and librarians are very important to keep the situation and improve it further
- Coordination between directors and librarians at primary and secondary schools are weak, and need to be improved
- Children's reading habits are not promoted broadly due to many competing social issues in the society
- Capacity building of librarians are much needed
- Wages and social security of librarians are very low and weak
- Parents are the ones who influence their children to read. But libraries should be more proactive and active to support children's interests in reading
- Capacity, experience and enthusiasm are main factors of successful librarians to support children and students visiting their libraries, and developing and maintaining their reading habits.
- But more institutional and policy support is needed for libraries and librarians.

c) Policy workshop

The policy workshop was organized among librarians of major children's libraries in the capital city and representatives of the Ministry of Culture under the leadership of the Children's Central Library jointly with the BBY Mongolia section.

The workshop was associated with the Month of Creative Culture, a campaign led by the Ministry of Culture.

Both key findings and a draft recommendation note of the survey were presented at the workshop. And after the presentations, participants of the workshop had groups discussions (5 groups) by focusing on four major issues raised from the survey and provided proposed recommendations and actions to be taken. The four issues were:

1. Support children's reading habits and making them friend with books
2. Improve and enrich collections of children's libraries
3. Capacity building of librarians at children's libraries
4. Encourage volunteering in children's reading promotion

Issues raised from all the group works were aligned with the findings of the survey but also enriched in terms of actions to be taken.

IV. Results in a brief

- a) In total 250 children, librarians and parents participated in the survey and consultations: 200 people attended in the survey and 50 people attended in group dialogues.
- b) 60 people representing the Ministry of Culture, the Children's Central Library and libraries, reading promoters attended in the policy workshop and provided their inputs into the final recommendation note.
- c) An analytical note and joint recommendations have been developed, consulted and agreed among the key stakeholders and communicated with some key institutions.
- d) Follow up actions discussed and committed by the Children's Central Library and libraries in Ulaanbaatar.

V. Some photos of the policy workshop



