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THE PARADOX OF HIGH HUMAN DEVELOPMENT WITH PERSISTENLY HIGH POVERTY AND INEQUALITY IN MONGOLIA

Presenting author: Munkhzul Chimid-Ochir,
PhD Candidate, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences,
Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia

Principal supervisor: Professor Udoy Saikia, Flinders University
Associate supervisor: Associate Professor Gouranga Dasvarma, Flinders University

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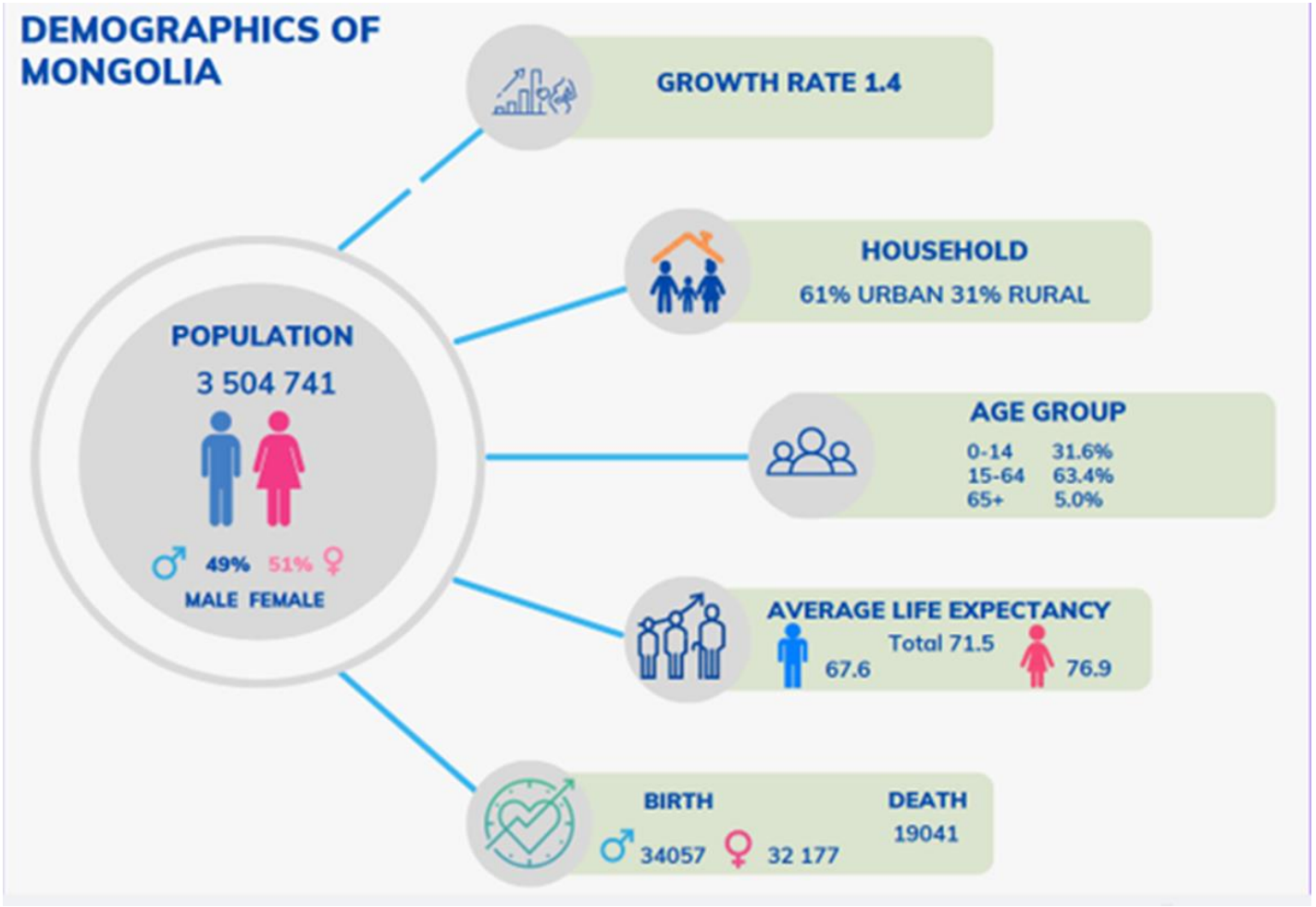
Introduction

- Human well-being is at the centre of global development agenda (Loveridge et al, 2020, OPHI & UNDP, 2023).
- Poverty, inequality and climate change are the most pressing challenges to human well-being (Adger et al, 2022; OPHI & UNDP, 2023).
- Addressing the above issues is crucial for human wellbeing and sustainable development (Adger et al, 2022; Alkire & Kovesdi, 2020; Shiba, 2022).
- Primary goal of development foundations in all nations, including Mongolia should be to enhance human wellbeing.

Mongolia

Map of Mongolia

- Land size 1.5 million km^2
- Population density 2 per km^2

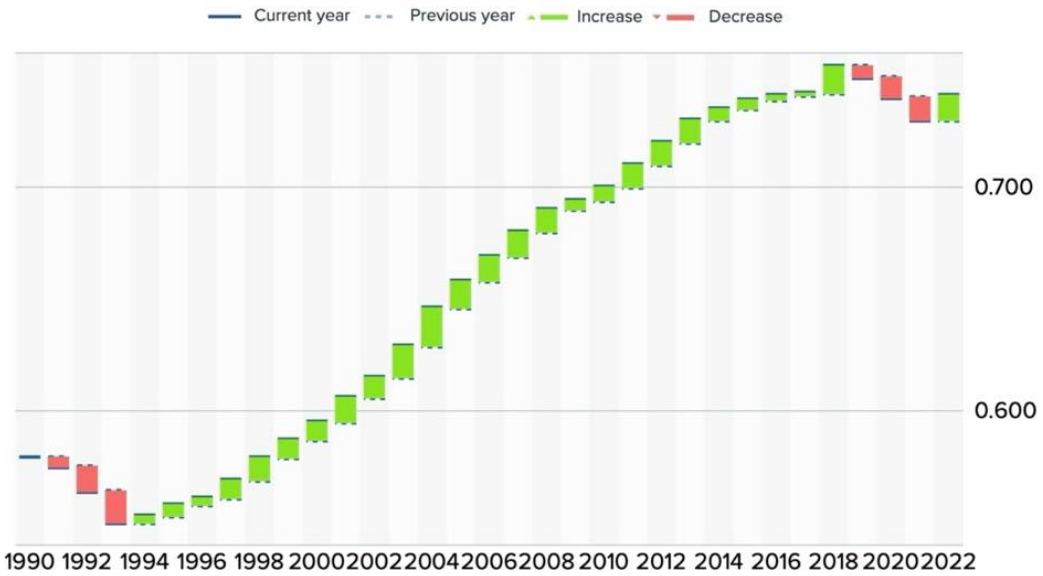


Source: Author & NSO, 2025

Problem Statement- High Human Development with Persistently High Poverty and inequality!

- Mongolia has high human development with an HDI of 0.741 in 2023.
- The country ranks 96 out of 193 countries in HDI.

Mongolia's HDI 1990-2022



Mongolia's human development progress 1990-2022

HDI	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita
Increased by 27.5%	Increased by 13.9 years	Increased by 4.4 years	Increased by 0.9 years	Increased by 2.3 times

Source: UNDP, 2020, 2022, 2023

Problem Statement- High Human Development with High Poverty and inequality!

- Mongolia's poverty remains high and unchanged. The poverty rate: 27% in 2012 and 27.8% in 2023 (World Bank, 2023; NSO, 2024).

- Disparities and inequalities among and within rural and urban territories are widening (Batbaatar et al, 2023, Dorjdagva et al, 2020; World Bank, 2023).

- The average temperature has increased by 2.14^0C in the past 70 years (MET, 2024), which is almost twice that of the global average increase of 1.18^0C (IPCC, 2023).

- Rural communities (herders) are the most exposed to climate risks, threatening their livelihood (DenchinIkhundev et al, 2021, Mijiddorj et al, 2020; Ren et al, 2017).

Research questions

This raises critical questions that the research aims to address:

- *Research question: Why have poverty and socio-economic inequality remained high in Mongolia despite the country's progress in human development? How has the climate change influenced these dynamics?*

Objective of the presentation:

- **Highlight some initial findings on the level of wellbeing**

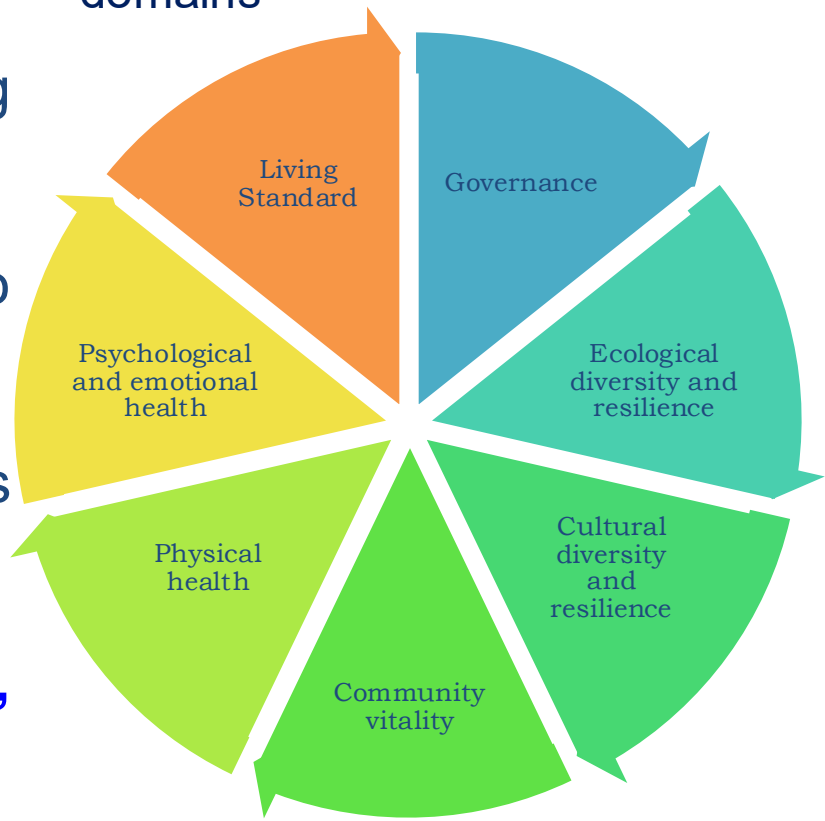
Theoretical Framework

Nobel laureate economist **Amartya Sen's capability approach**:

- **Development is expansion of capability,** not just increasing income, consumption, health and education.
- Capability refers to people's freedom and opportunities to achieve what they can do or be.
- This approach recognises that different people and societies might have different capabilities.
- **It advocates considering local contexts, cultural factors, and individual preferences when evaluating well-being.**

Source: Sen, 1999; Alkire & Foster, 2011; Adger et al, 2022; Frediani, 2010, Schech et al, 2022

Human well-being domains



Source: Saikia et al, 2018

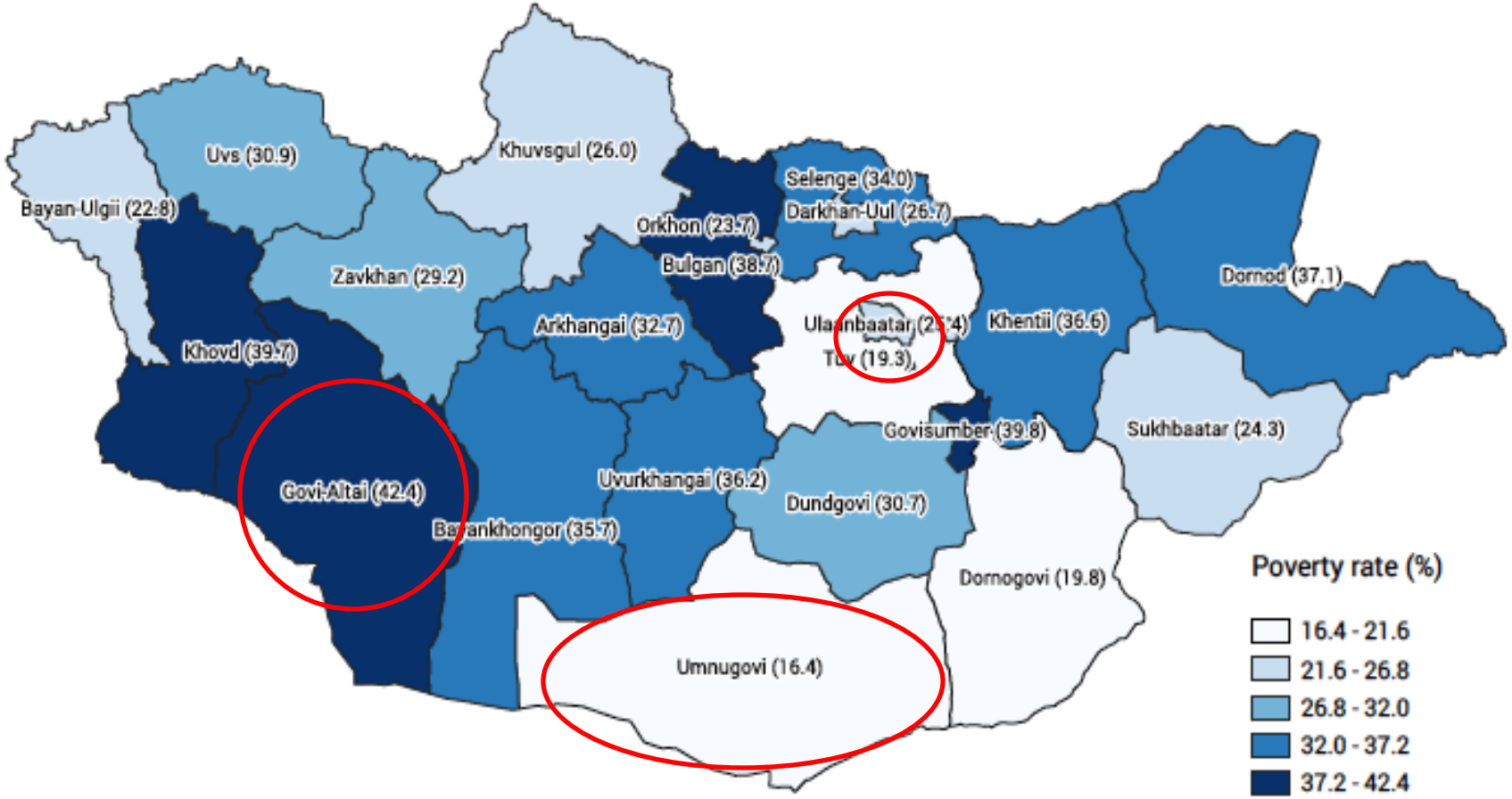
Flinders University Wellbeing Methodology

- Innovative and more comprehensive measurement tool.
- Capture both **measurable outcomes** and **progress of lived experiences:**
  - HDI's objective elements: statistical data on **life expectancy, education and income;**
  - GNH's **subjective elements**: Personal and community perceptions of wellbeing, happiness and quality of life.
- Calculating wellbeing:
  - **Recode** each variable either **''dissatisfied'' or ''satisfied'';**
  - **Use two cut/off points: one across variables in each domain** and a **second cut-off apply in overall across domains**;
  - Add all the scores in each domain for the overall wellbeing satisfaction.

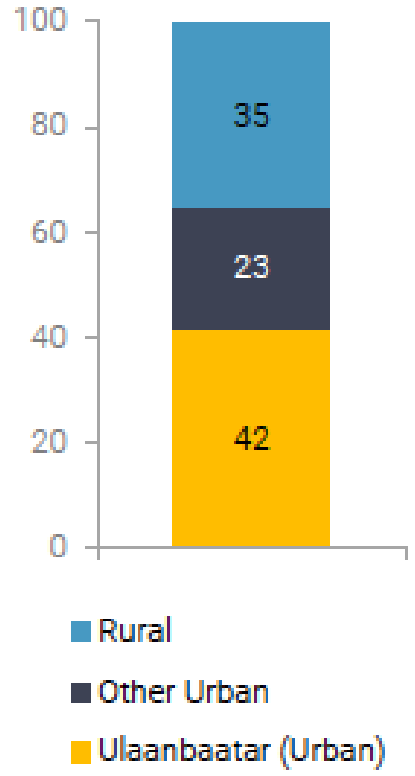
Source: Saikia et al, 2018, 2021

Research sites

Poverty by provinces in 2020 and survey sites



Share of people with low income in 2020



Source: NSO & World Bank, 2020

Research method, sampling & data collection

- A **mixed method** research (quantitative and qualitative).
- **Six locations** are purposively selected to include high and low levels of **poverty** and **extreme and moderate climate.**
- A total of **592 households** are selected from all locations by systematic sampling in each location.
- **Household surveys** are conducted online by using **Qualtrics.**
- **Analysis** is done by using **SPSS and NVivo.**

Household survey

No	Research site	Total number of households	Reasons for selection	Sample size	Sampling fraction (%)
1	Umnugobi, Dalanzadgad	842	Low poverty and less *dzud* in rural	106	12.5
2	Umnugobi, Bayandalai	419	Low poverty and high *dzud* in rural	61	14.6
3	Gobi-Altai, Esonbulag	554	High poverty and high *dzud* in rural	64	11.6
4	Gobi-Altai, Sharga	361	High poverty and less *dzud* in rural	62	17.2
5	Songinokhairkhan district 3 horoo	2,311	High poverty in urban	236	10.2
6	Sukhbaatar district 2 horoo	565	Low poverty in urban	63	11.2
Total		**5,052**		**592**	11.7

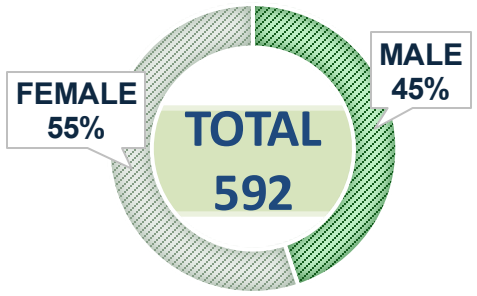
Note: A dzud is an extreme weather event with temperatures dropping to -30°C or lower, with strong winds, heavy snow and ice.

Source: Author, 2025

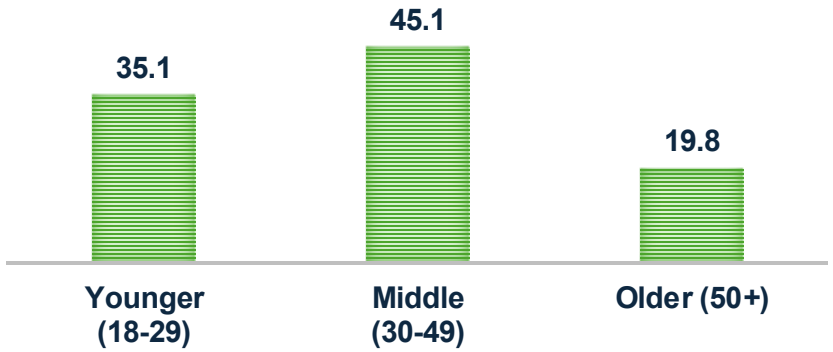
Household survey photos

Household survey

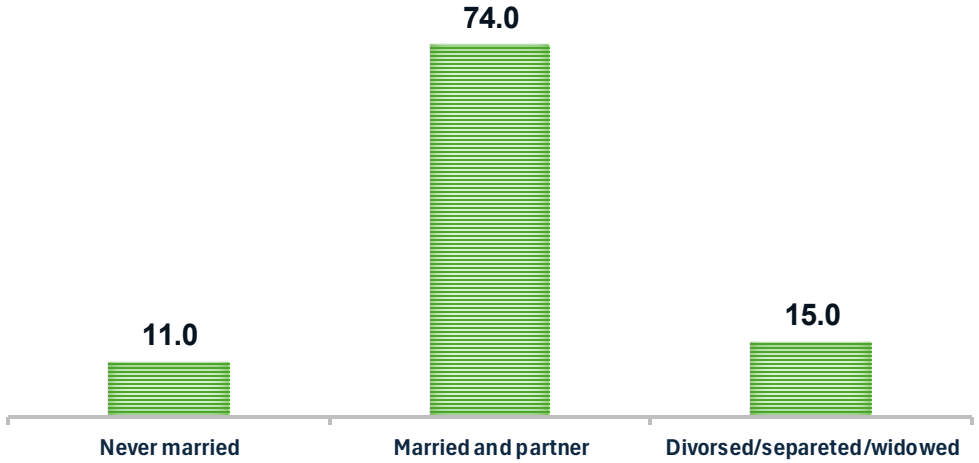
GENDER



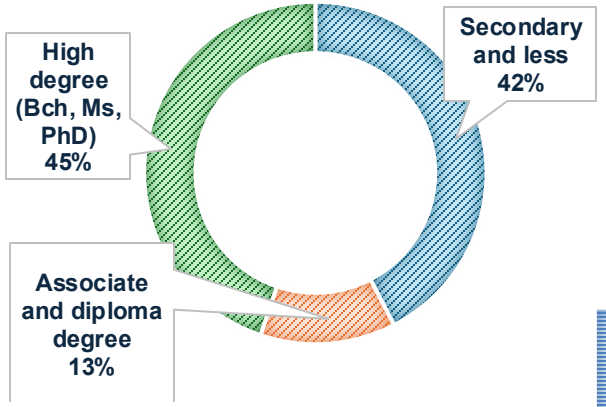
AGE GROUP, %



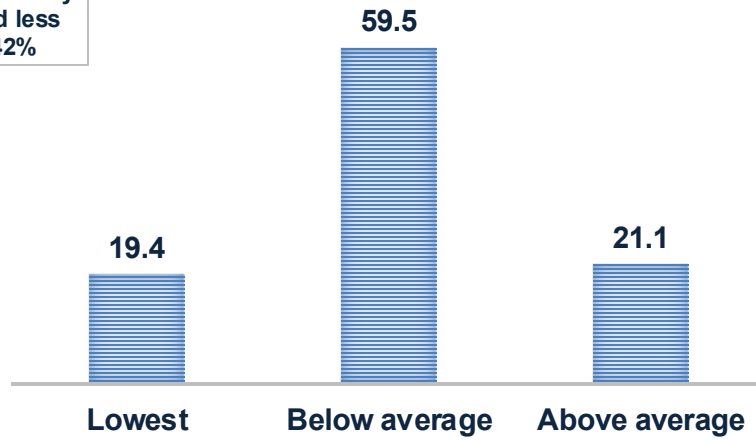
MARITAL STATUS, %



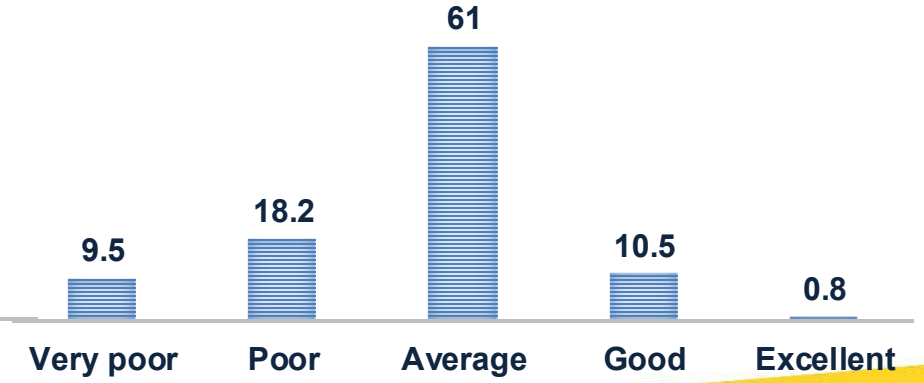
EDUCATION LEVEL



INCOME LEVEL, %



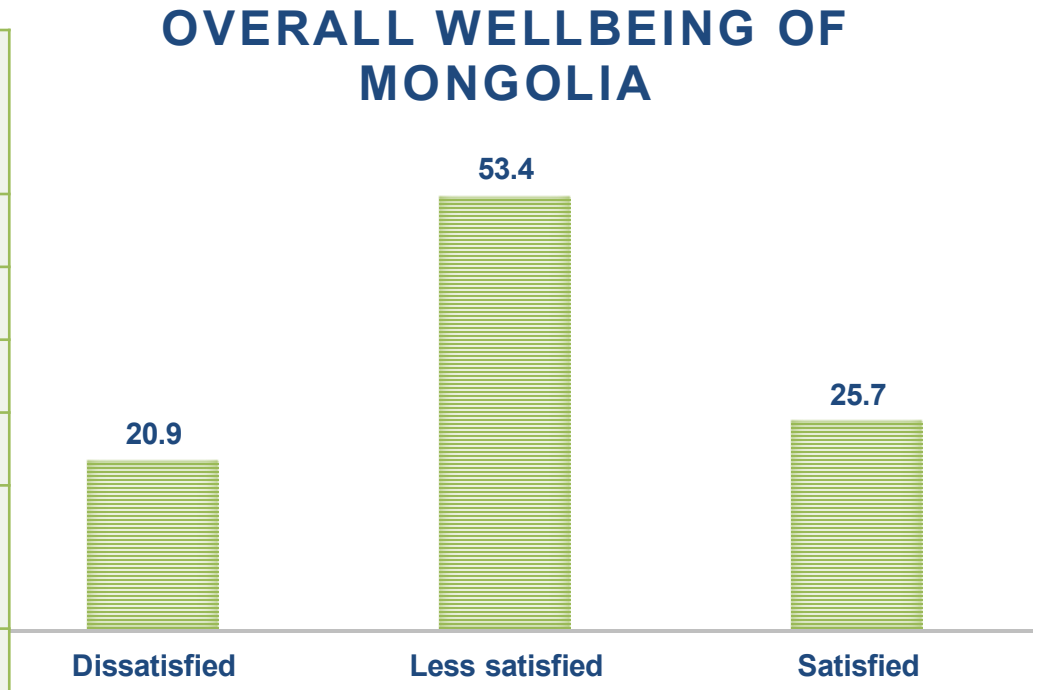
SELF-RATE LIVING STANDARD, %



Source: Author, 2025

Results, analysis & discussions

Wellbeing domains	Dissatisfied, %	Satisfied, %
Living standards	**71.1**	28.9
Education	**70.1**	29.9
Health	**79.2**	20.8
Emotional wellbeing	36.5	**63.5**
Environment and climate change	**88.1**	11.8
Community vitality	29.4	**70.6**
Governance	**89.2**	10.8



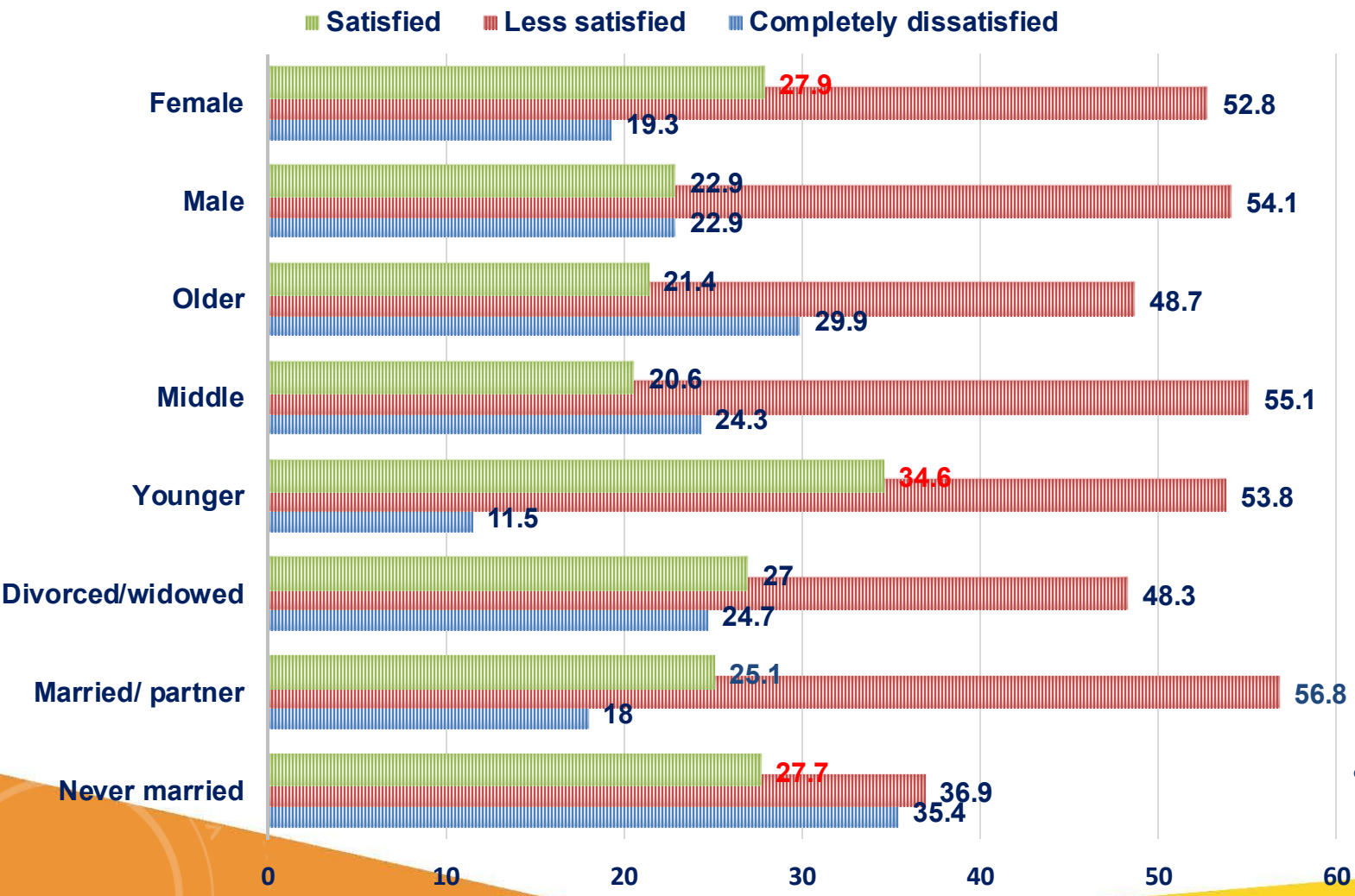
- **Satisfied 2** domains
- Dissatisfied 5 domains
- **Governance, climate change and health are lowest**

- 20.9% have completely dissatisfied
- Majority 53.4% have less satisfied
- 25.7% have satisfied

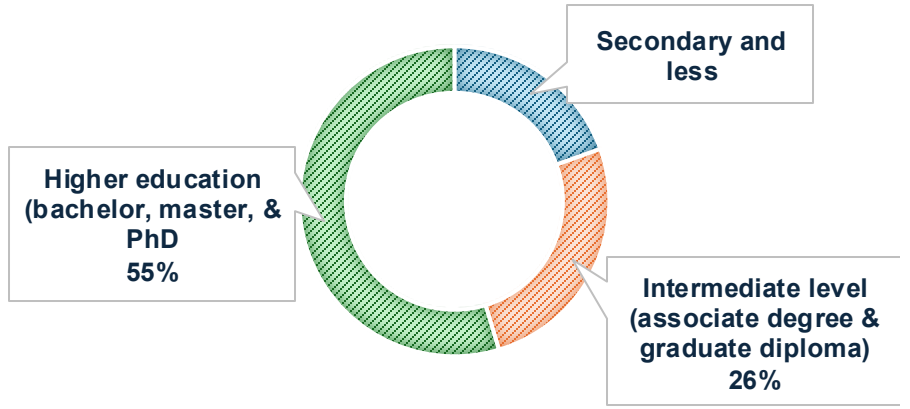
Source: Author, 2025

Results, analysis & discussions

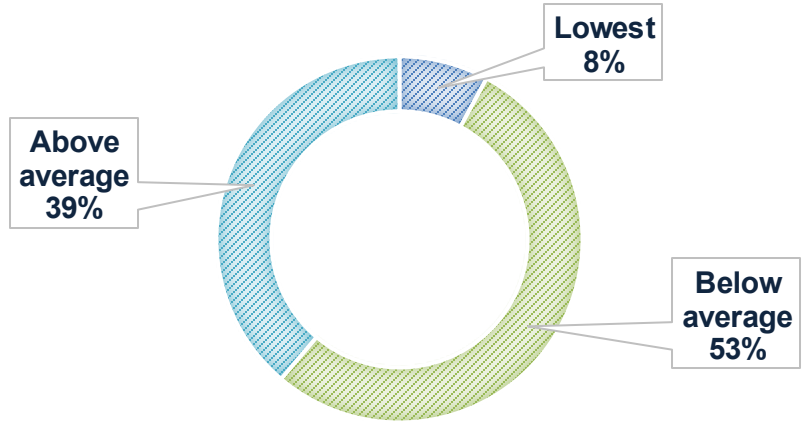
WELLBEING DISTRIBUTION BY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS



WELLBEING BY EDUCATION (SATISFIED)



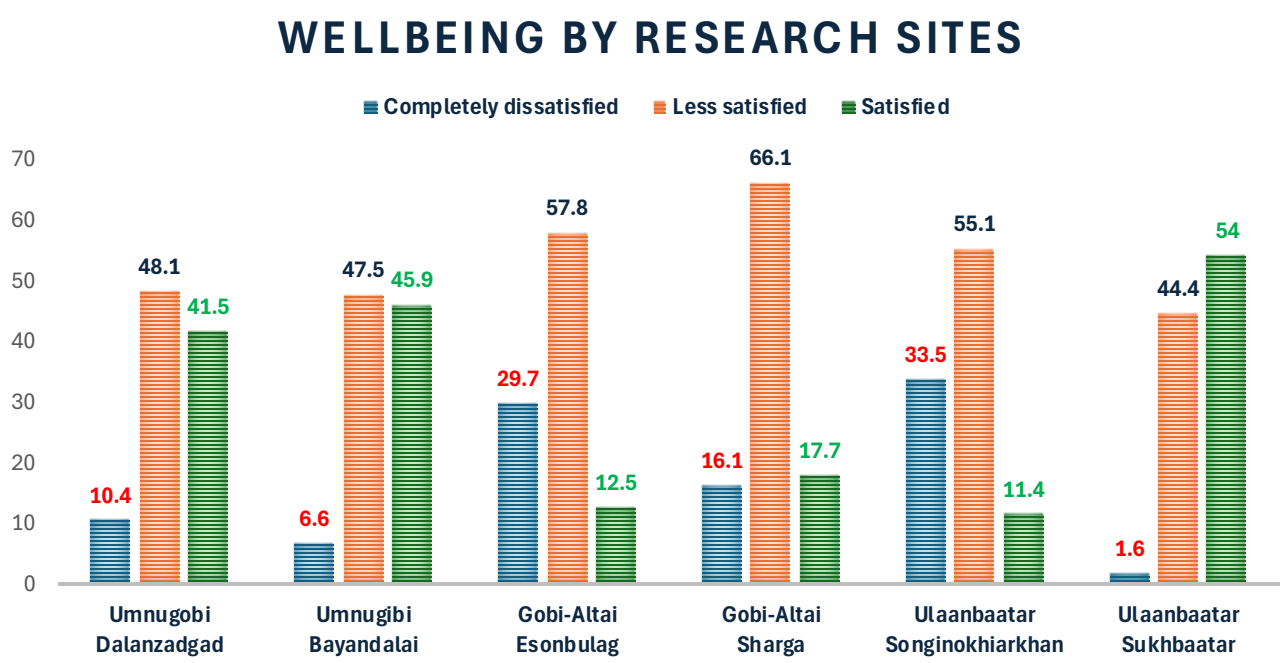
WELLBEING BY INCOME (SATISFIED)



- Higher education and income level have greater wellbeing satisfaction

Source: Author, 2025

Results, analysis & discussions



WELLBEING CORRELATIONS ACROSS DIMENSIONS

	OWB	LSW	EDQ	HEW	EMW	CCW	COMW	GOVW
OWB	1	0.607**	0.632**	0.582**	0.671**	0.420**	0.703**	0.431**
LSW	0.607**	1	0.430**	0.390**	0.336**	0.263**	0.313**	0.282**
EDQ	0.632**	0.430**	1	0.439**	0.326**	0.252**	0.308**	0.331**
HEW	0.582**	0.390**	0.439**	1	0.310**	0.341**	0.257**	0.358**
EMW	0.671**	0.336**	0.326**	0.310**	1	0.180**	0.559**	0.219**
CCW	0.420**	0.263**	0.252**	0.341**	0.180**	1	0.202**	0.378**
COMW	0.703**	0.313**	0.308**	0.257**	0.559**	0.202**	1	0.189**
GOVW	0.431**	0.282**	0.331**	0.358**	0.219**	0.378**	0.189**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Sig. (2-tailed was <0.01 to all domains).

- **Overall wellbeing** by research sites significantly reflects the poverty level.
- High poverty sites demonstrate higher in dissatisfaction at 29.7% in Esonbulag, 16.1% in Sharga, and 33.5% in Soniginokhairkhan.

- All seven dimensions show significant positive correlations to overall wellbeing satisfaction in Mongolia.

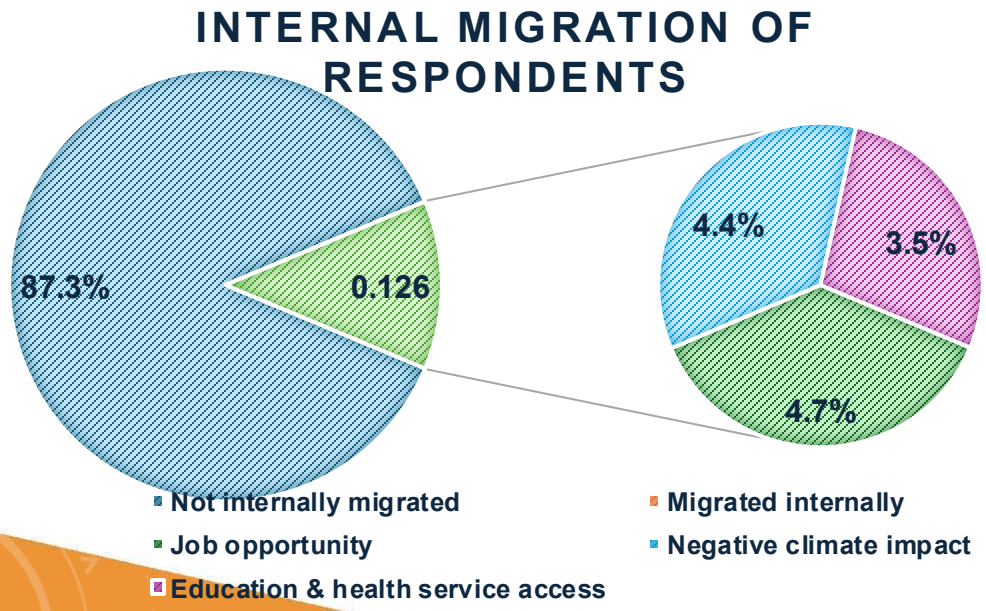
Source: Author, 2025

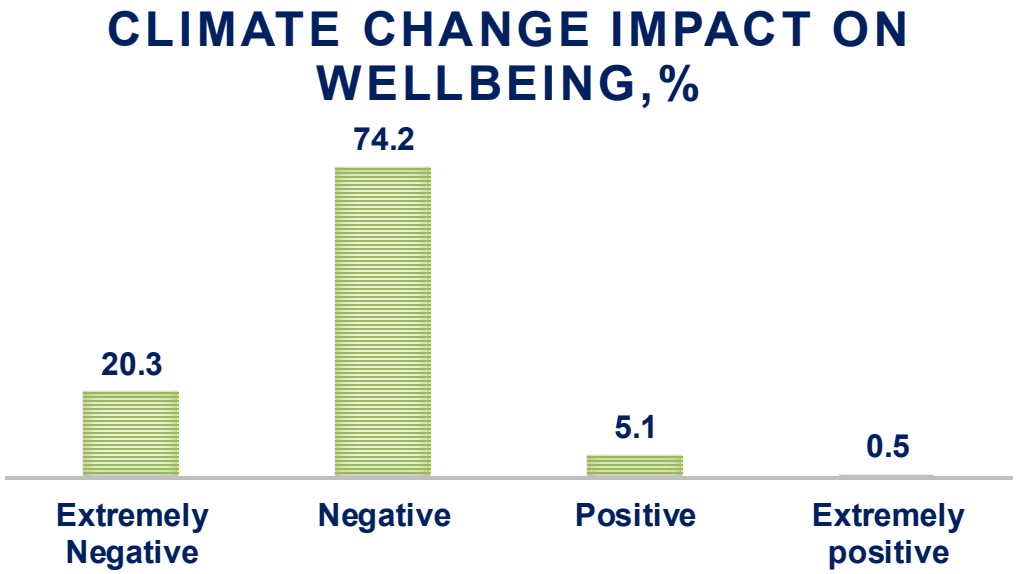
Climate change impact on wellbeing

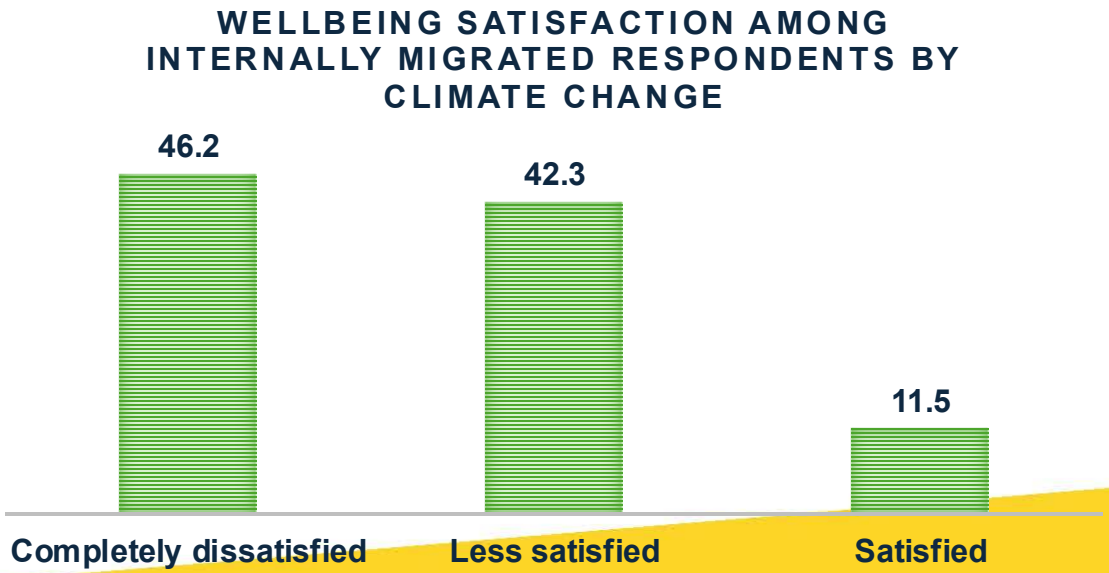
Poverty factors

Factors	Mean value
Poor governance	3.3
Negative climate impact	2.86
Unfavourable socio-economic conditions	2.86
Own capability	2.3

Note: SPSS Correlation is significant <0.01) to all dimensions (max 4.0 & min 1.0)







Source: Author, 2025

Conclusion

- The **contradiction** between human development and human wellbeing **in Mongolia is unravelled by using a multi-dimensional well-being analysis.**
- **High HDI of 0.741**, yet overall. **74.3% are not satisfied** with their wellbeing.
- **More than 70% are "Dissatisfied" in every domain except the Emotional and Community Vitality domains.**
- **Two of the domains exhibiting the highest "Dissatisfaction" are Environment/Climate Change and Governance.**
- **Policies and strategies should target the demographic groups with higher "dissatisfaction" levels, so that the well-being of these groups, and that of the nation can be improved.**
- **These groups are: Males, Middle/Older age-groups and the Never Married.**

Acknowledgement

- IUSSP- for the opportunity to present my ongoing research findings
- College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University, Adelaide – for providing the facilities as a Doctoral student.
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Thank you for your attention

Contact authors:

Presenting Author: Munkhzul Chimid-Ochir, PhD Candidate,
College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University, South Australia

Email: munkhzul.chimidochir@flinders.edu.au and mchimidochir@gmail.com

Principal Supervisor: Udoy Saikia, Professor, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University, South Australia
Email: udoy.saikia@flinders.edu.au

Associate supervisor: Gouranga Dasvarma, Associate Professor, College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences, Flinders University, South Australia

Email: gour.dasvarma@flinders.edu.au