As Mongolia moves into a new phase of its development, driven predominantly by rapid economic growth in the extractive industries, it faces a number of significant challenges. Rapid rates of urbanization are leading to an increasingly overwhelming concentration of the population in urban centers, especially Ulaanbaatar. In 1989, 26.8 percent of Mongolia’s population lived in Ulaanbaatar. Today more than half of the population of Mongolia now lives in Ulaanbaatar, with a total population of approximately 1.2 million. Growth in the capital city is expected to continue apace.

As a result of this rapid population growth, more than half the area of Ulaanbaatar today consists of unplanned settlements called ger districts, which house more than half of the city’s residents and nearly 25 percent of Mongolia’s total population. Dealing with the ramifications of these large, unplanned settlements and effectively delivering basic services to all the city’s residents has been, and will remain, a massive challenge. It is a challenge made all the more difficult by the low-density settlement patterns in the ger districts and the extreme climate of Mongolia. These factors significantly increase the cost of delivering urban services such as water, electricity, waste management, transportation and other core needs.

THE ASIA FOUNDATION IN THE GER DISTRICTS

The Asia Foundation has been working to support improvements in the ger districts for a number of years. Among the projects already completed is the Strengthening Security in Ulaanbaatar’s Ger Districts program (October 2009 – March 2010) funded by the British Embassy in Mongolia. This project supported the application of Community Oriented Policing (COP) to help community councils improve security in ger districts, both on their own and in partnership with the local police.

PROGRAM DURATION
May 2012 – May 2015

PROGRAM PARTNERS
The Municipality of Ulaanbaatar city is a partner of the Urban Services in the Ger Area Districts of Ulaanbaatar program.

PROGRAM SUPPORT
The program is generously supported by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).
The Foundation has also worked closely with the Ministry of Justice and ger district communities to introduce community-based mediation to selected areas of Ulaanbaatar. With the Foundation’s support, local citizens established a community-based system of dispute resolution in the form of community mediation boards to address local disputes in ger communities. As a result of pilot projects implemented in four different khoroo (sub-districts) of UB city, the community mediation approach proved to be quite effective in local dispute resolution. Out of approximately 60 small disputes brought to the attention of mediation boards during the pilot period from January to March 2012, 15 cases were successfully resolved. In the long term, the piloted community-based mediation mechanisms could be applied as a standard practice.

PROGRAM GOAL AND OBJECTIVES
In May 2012, the Foundation signed an institutional partnership agreement with AusAID to launch various initiatives relating to good governance, health and education across the Asian region. These initiatives are designed with an emphasis on flexibility and adaptability to ensure that they are timely, opportune and likely to achieve significant impact.

In Mongolia, the initiative under the institutional partnership aims to improve urban services in the ger districts of Ulaanbaatar. An initial fact-finding exercise identified solid waste management and the availability of public and private transportation as key areas for program development. The Foundation is currently cultivating partnerships with the UB city government, civil society actors and district agencies that will allow specific activities to be designed and implemented.

Given the flexible nature of the program, the Foundation will have the potential to exploit emerging opportunities and form promising new partnerships that reach beyond the two initial focus areas. The Foundation’s approach seeks to initiate short-term improvements in services, while developing long-term solutions for the development of the city. In addition, the Foundation will seek, where possible, to support policies and plans that will not only improve service delivery, but provide economic opportunities for ger district residents.