



SUCCESS STORY

Ger Residents Rope in New Jobs

Women tap demand for traditional culture to increase family income



Photo: Purevsuren Purev-Och, GER Initiative

The Erchim Group makes ropes for gers out of yak hair.

“I am proud of our work,” said Tsendsuren, a member of the Erchim Group. “We are contributing to the increased awareness and appreciation of the Mongolian culture in the world and that we are doing honest work from our hearts.”

Faced with the demands of modern society, Mongolia’s traditional culture seems to be dwindling with each day. But seven enterprising women in Erdenet have embraced their cultural traditions — and are turning them into profit.

In April 2004, unemployed and looking for a way to gain income for their families, the women noticed that foreigners were creating an increasing demand for *gers*, the traditional Mongolian dwelling. They decided to form a business — the Erchim Group — to produce sets of blended yak- and horse-hair ropes used for ger interiors and exteriors.

Through their perseverance, collaborative efforts and the assistance of the USAID-funded GER (Growing Entrepreneurship Rapidly) Initiative, the Erchim group has captured a unique market niche and created gainful employment for themselves and others in their community.

The GER Initiative saw the group’s potential and encouraged linkages between local ger residents and established companies.

The ger, or *yurt* as it is also called, is a form of portable housing widely used by Mongolian nomads. It is a circular structure that consists of walls where a tall latticework made of willow branches, called a *khana*, is lashed together with yak- or horse-hair twine. The Erchim Group uses the hair leftover from cashmere production to create that twine.

Their teamwork is paying off. The Erchim’s Group’s high-quality ropes earned the group its first large order from a company that manufactures and exports gers all over the world. Erchim successfully fulfilled its first order with the company, which led to more, high-volume orders. Having established itself as a quality maker of ger ropes, Erchim has also attracted the attention of other companies interested in ordering ger ropes.

“We plan to increase our production to meet the growing demand for our ropes,” said Buzmee, a member of the group. “Eventually, we hope to spin off into multiple groups of rope-makers in order to create more jobs for the unemployed, as we were ourselves before we started working together!”