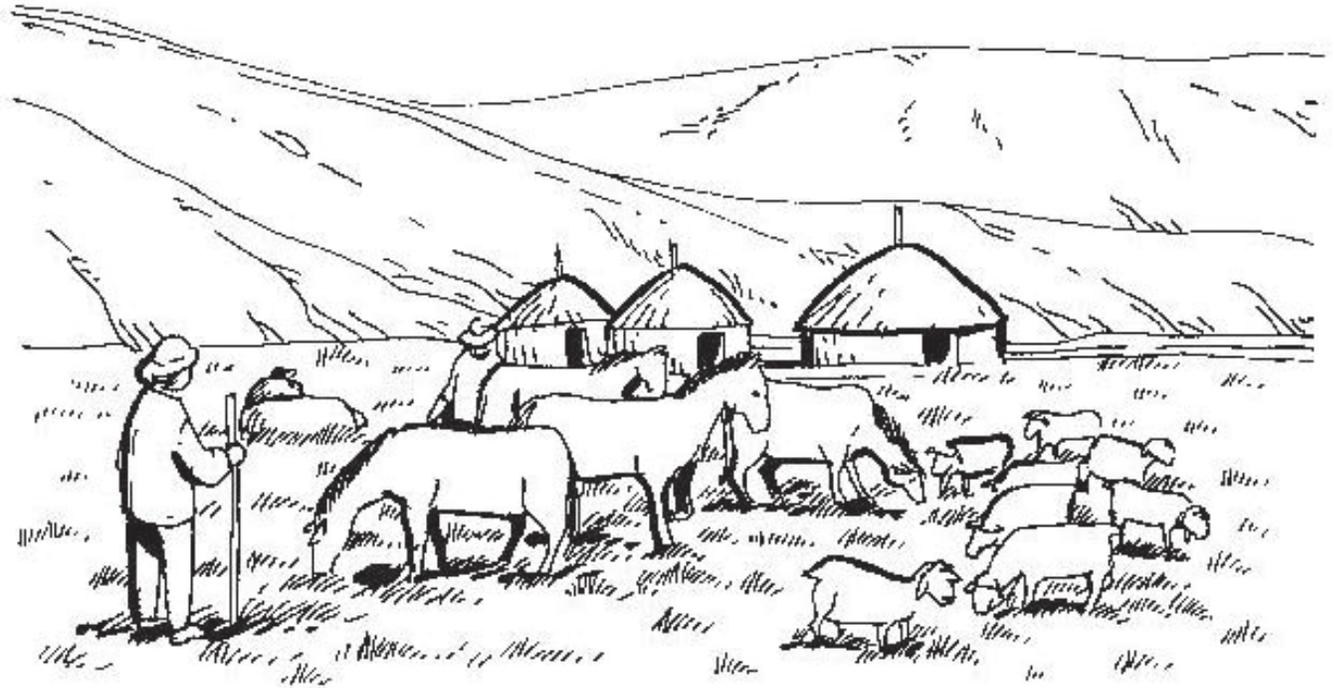


Community-based Co-management of Grassland Resources in Mongolia



The grasslands of Mongolia, which make up about 82 per cent of the country's land area, represent the largest remaining contiguous area of common grazing land in the world. They are home to some 176,000 herding families and 23.9 million heads of livestock (2002).

Nomadic livestock producers are the backbone of the Mongolian economy. Livestock production accounted for 45 per cent of employment and 21 per cent of the gross domestic product in 2002. The tradition of herding is rooted in the country's long history, and grasslands or pasturelands have always been a common property resource.

However, more than 75 per cent of the country's grasslands are overgrazed and becoming desertified as a result of the growing number of herd families and herd sizes, severe climatic conditions, intensified agricultural practices, poor management, and the impact of the recent economic transition, among others.

Source

H. Ykhanbai, B. Minjigdorj, E. Bulgan, and the Team, 'Co-Management of Pastureland in Mongolia.' Ministry for the Nature and the Environment, Mongolia. Case paper No. 8 dated 25 May 2004.

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In response to this situation, co-management approaches, interwoven with traditional practices, were introduced and have since yielded lessons for community herder groups, local governments, NGOs and other stakeholders.

Grasslands as a Common Resource: A Historical Perspective

Pastures or grasslands in Mongolia have never been under private ownership. They are and have always been the property of the State and used in common by herders or customary groups.

Open ranges and grasslands used to be controlled by feudal clans and tribal groups. Even then, however, they were commonly owned and used by herders who would come and go with the seasons, bearing their herds and their families.

Herder groups used different pastures or areas for spring, summer, autumn, and winter grazing; this system was developed and adapted to meet local climatic variations and livelihood needs. Herders moved their animals and camps throughout the four seasons, and it was common for a small group of herding families (*khot ail*) to move

together to a new seasonal pasture. Within

a given season there were also shifting and rotational systems which meant that animals grazed in different areas in a seasonal pasture, as agreed by customary groups of herders and local governments.

The Great Yassa Code of 1229 linked specific groups of herders to geographically defined territories, and nomadic movements were coordinated by designated leaders.

The Khalka Djurim of 1709 further defined customary law by providing explicit references to pasture rights, distinguishing between secular and monastery herds. It also made provisions for sacred sites and reserved camp sites; and formalized the criteria for settling disputes over campsites. In the late 18th century, other formal regulations were enacted prohibiting certain long distance movements across territorial boundaries.

Under the Soviet era (1921-1990), all croplands, pasturelands and even livestock, became the property of the State. Citizens used State pasturelands to herd State-owned animals in exchange for a salary. Seasonal grazing movement schemes and pasture use regulations were developed, adopted and administered by *collectives* as State entities. Under this system, no disputes arose between herders over pasturelands since the State, through the collectives, made most of the decisions.



In 1992, following the transition from a centralized Soviet-style management system towards a more market-oriented one, private ownership of animals was re-instituted. It was in this period that herder families increased 2.5 times, and livestock by about 17.5 per cent. Pasture management authority and responsibility was also devolved to the local level governments and herders. The new Land Law (2002) defines pasturelands in Mongolia as public property under the common use principle.

Issues and Problems

Recent Economic Transition

Following the recent economic transition, stakeholders in pasture and natural resource management are now having to “unlearn” their practices under a centrally planned economy in order to cope with the impact of the “opening up” of the country’s economic and political systems.

In the Soviet era, herders were guaranteed full employment, and some elements of the customary system were maintained. In the post-Soviet period, herders are no longer employed by the State.



Hence, old-style herding

became an easy entry option for the increasing number of unemployed. This led to an increase in herd sizes to maximize profit, and ultimately to greater pressure on the fragile environment. Between 1992 and 1999, the number of families involved in herding more than doubled, and livestock numbers increased by some 30 per cent (National Statistical Yearbook, 2002) to 33 million, a first in Mongolian history. During this transition period, the weak arrangements between herders and local administrations, as well as the lack of an appropriate management system, worsened pasture conditions and led to widespread overgrazing.

Open Access Lands

The view that grasslands or pasturelands are a common resource and public property has created an open access situation. Shorter term economic and livelihood needs are pushing families to increase their herd sizes as a means of survival in the face of competitive market conditions.

Increased Concentration, Less Mobility

Herder families are also moving less frequently due to competition for land. This has led to a concentration of animals around water sources, settlement areas, haylands, and seasonal camps, and thus to a breakdown of the customary system of nomadic pastoralism, which had heretofore been an effective way of using and managing grasslands.

Fragile Ecosystems and Harsh Weather Conditions

Pastureland ecosystems in Mongolia are fragile, highly susceptible to degradation, and slow to recover. Harsh weather conditions, in the form of *dzuds* or severe winter seasons, over the last few years has had a devastating impact on the livelihood of most herders. Consecutive *dzuds* from 1999 to 2002 resulted in a combined loss of over 10 million animals, or over 30 per cent of total livestock. Almost 12,000 herding families were left without animals, and a further 18,000 were left with fewer than 100 animals (Ykhanbai et al, 2003). Coupled with the progressive degradation of pasturelands, this situation could pose a serious environmental and economic problem for the country.

Limited Capacity of the State

The limited capacity of the State to effectively monitor and manage the pasturelands has helped create an open access situation. The current capacity of national and local government for pastureland management, particularly in providing policy guidance and building the capacity of resource users, needs to be strengthened. There also has to be a more visible and appropriate policy to support communal arrangements for common property resources such as pasturelands.

Testing Co-management Approaches

In response to the issues cited above, co-management approaches to natural resource management were introduced through a project called "Sustainable Management of Common Natural Resources in Mongolia". This was supported by IDRC-Canada, and implemented by the Ministry of Nature and Environment in collaboration with other ministries and NGOs.

The project sought to address the challenge of environmental degradation through a combination of participatory and action-oriented field research in three *sums* (districts). These districts are representative of Mongolia's herding systems, its three main ecoregions (steppe, mountain-steppe, and steppe-

Co-management is the sharing of authority and responsibility among stakeholders, a decentralized approach to decision making that involves user groups as partners or co-equal decision-makers with government.

(Jentoft, 1989; Pinkerton, 1989; Berkes, 1991)

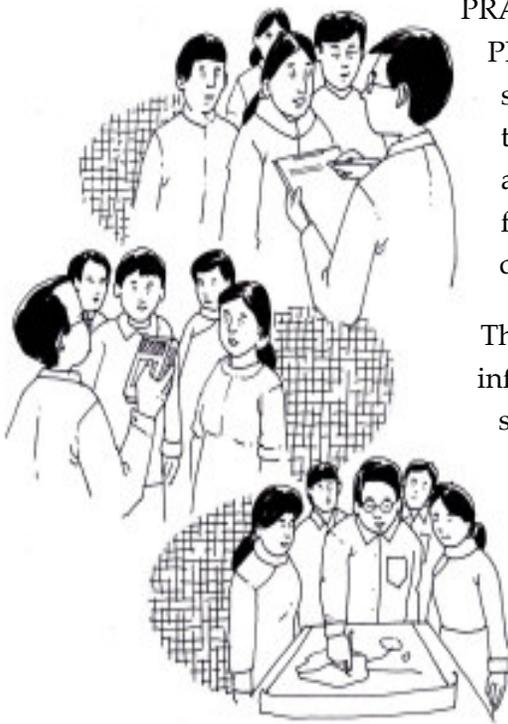
forest), and the different forms of social organization, and were thus selected in order to test the feasibility of co-management arrangements in different settings.

The Project aimed to develop more community-centered or participatory approaches to natural resource management based on co-management principles. It sought to modify traditional systems by providing policy and institutional arrangements at the local and national levels. Such policies and arrangements should allow for more herder group rights and responsibilities.

Project Approaches and Strategies

Prior to the start of the Project, a one-year study was carried out to understand the issues of pasture management, conduct a profiling of various ecosystems, and to learn participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods. A multidisciplinary team of eight women and seven men was constituted, most of whom were born and grew up with their herding families.

Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)



PRA was used as a general method for the study. Various PRA tools, such as focus group discussions (FGDs), semi-structured field interviews, household surveys, oral testimonies, mapping of herd movements, gender assessment study, seasonal diagramming, and semi-formal interviews with individuals, were used for qualitative analysis.

The use of PRA facilitated the following: generating information and information sharing among the stakeholders; prioritization of problems; identification of pasture management practices; and mapping of natural resources, seasonal pastures, water sources, infrastructure, etc. PRA also fostered a sense of “ownership” of the pastureland; heightened awareness of environmental and socio-economic problems, and the need to protect and manage pasturelands; promoted accountability and transparency; and fostered recognition of the role of women.

Community Organizing

The Project team selected herders that were widely respected in the community to serve as entry points for discussion in the neighborhoods. After the PRA meetings, herders consulted with each other about the possibility of forming a community organization, and the majority agreed to form one among themselves.

Co-management mechanisms

Community Herder Groups

A group of 13 to 32 herding families compose a community of herder groups for each project area. Each group is considered as a relatively homogeneous economic or social unit in terms of family, language, history, ecosystem and other similar characteristics.

Co-management Agreements

Co-management agreements are instituted among herders within a community; and between communities and local level governments. Roles and responsibilities of the parties involved are agreed upon and stipulated in these agreements.

Sum Level Co-management Team

A multi-stakeholder group, called the *sum* level co-management team, is also established, with representatives from herder communities, local governors, NGOs, local schools, other (community) leaders, and some members of the project team.

Community Revolving Funds

When the community organization was established, herders agreed to create community revolving funds, which were made up of contributions by members of the community. The contributions were animals, such as sheep and goat, cashmere etc. The project contributed cash for the development of small credit schemes. These revolving funds are used by the communities to organize activities and to support poor members. Some 10 communities have a fund of up to 2 million MNT.

In the beginning, only the men attended the meetings of the community organization. Later on, the women also joined. In pastoral agriculture, both women and men play important but different roles; however, the role of the women is usually undervalued. Women's groups were thus established in all the communities to increase their participation in decision-making for natural resource management (NRM). The Project encouraged women's initiatives in protecting natural resources according to inherited knowledge and customs.

Assisted by the women's groups, the community leaders organized activities among the women to support income-generating projects (*e.g.*, handicrafts, felt-making, vegetable growing); provide venues for learning from each other; and perform participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E) of the community's co-management efforts.

Capacity Building

The Project also provided various support services, such as (1) training (in NRM, pasture management, seeding of haylands, reforestation, handicraft making, project monitoring and evaluation); (2) networking; (3) venues for sharing experiences among groups (such as inter-site, and herder-to-herder visits); and (4) institutional support (micro-credit schemes, setting up of information database, organizing community groups, drafting policies and regulations).

Participatory Processes and Conflict Management

Stakeholders' equal participation in the planning process facilitated the following:

- Incorporation of all stakeholders' viewpoints;
- Support for initiatives by herders and communities;
- Sharing of knowledge among stakeholders in planning and implementation;

- Resolution of equity issues and conflicts between community and non-community herders, between herders within and outside the community organization, and between herders within the community, as well as disagreements with newcomers.

Linking the local to the national

Linkages between natural resource management policy and planning activities at local and national levels were strengthened. By facilitating the flow of information from the local to the national level, and vice versa, the Project helped to ensure that local issues are considered in the preparation of national level plans. Discussions with herder groups on the drafts of national policies and legal documents also facilitated feedback and incorporated local inputs into the national law.

Changes and Outcomes

The implementation of co-management procedures resulted in the following major changes:

Increased cooperation between herders, local governors and other stakeholders

Herders became aware that the effectiveness of the mechanisms instituted depended on joint action, and thus understood the benefit of cooperating with one another and with local institutions. By being part of a community, herders became conscious of their strength as a group, to influence *sum* or *bag* governors, and to contribute to the implementation of good pasture policy. PRA helped herders understand the importance of their equal participation in NRM and to learn to express their ideas.

Establishment of CBNRM institutions, increased capacity of communities, and improved livelihood for herders

In the three years that the Project was implemented, the number of communities in the project area has increased from three to 15, and new ones are currently being established. Communities have been trained in PRA and participatory monitoring and evaluation. Women members have gained capability in PM&E. New livelihood activities have brought about short-term economic benefits to herding families. Herders have acquired new and additional sources of income, such as planting vegetables and making handicrafts. The income of herders in the study sites has increased by up to 67 per cent in the last three years.

Why did herders decide to join community organizations?

Both rich and poor herders were interested in arresting environmental degradation and increasing their economic benefits. Poor herders were the most interested in being involved in CBNRM because of their need to improve their livelihood, secure their pastures, participate in decision-making, and reduce the costs of herding animals. On the other hand, the richer herders were concerned with maintaining positive social relations and ensuring the supply of labor for agriculture production. Some richer herders who refused to participate in the community organizations at the beginning joined eventually, after several discussions and negotiations with the district level management team.



Contents of Co-Management Contracts

The rights and responsibilities of community members, *sum* and *bag* governors are stated in the contracts. The roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, as agreed upon in community meetings and discussions, are also included.

Local governors agree:

- To approve community rights to exploit/allocate certain pasture areas according to the laws and regulations;
- To link more effectively the *sum*'s economic and social policy with community activities, and to support their sustainable NRM and livelihood activities;
- To define community pasture borders in the *bag* and to discuss this during the *bag*'s people's representatives meeting; and
- To regulate exclusion, in communication with other governors, of outsiders from the community pasture area.

The community members agree:

- To follow the community rules and regulations;
- To follow community decisions on pasture use; and
- To work in close connection with other members and to exchange experiences, etc.

The agreements are valid for four years and are assessed annually at the stakeholders' meeting.

(As part of project interventions, several communities entered into contracts with local government on pasture use, according to the new Land Law provisions. In these contracts, boundaries for seasonal pasture were clearly agreed to in the topographic maps, and all regulatory measures, as well as responsibilities of protection and use rights were then transferred to the community.)

Introduction of customary and innovative pasture use practices

A survey in 2003 showed that 87 per cent of the community members think that community joint efforts in the shifting and rotation of seasonal pasture have improved the overall pasture quality, and that more than half of community members in all the study sites are now able to calculate pasture (carrying) capacity by themselves.

Through the protection and improvement of community hayfields, establishment of a hay/fodder fund, and preparation of additional fodder for the winter season, herders in the study sites have been able to reduce average annual animal losses to an average of six to 12 per cent.

Learnings and Challenges

Mongolia's experience in community-based co-management of grassland resources has generated some significant lessons as well as highlighted a number of continuing challenges. These include the following:

1. Establishment of resource management groups within communities helps to draw people's attention to sustaining the ecosystem and relating this to rural development;
2. Broad participation, transparency and collective decision-making help ensure the success of community-based natural resource management;
3. Co-management creates an effective link between local and central governments in the context of decentralization; and between government and herder groups in the sustainable management of common grazing lands;
4. Awareness-building and understanding by all stakeholders are important in order to settle conflicts and disputes, especially among herder groups;

5. The optimal size of herder groups and their communities depends on the characteristics of the ecosystem, sustainable livelihood opportunities, as well as the traditions and local culture of the herder communities. Over time, it will be important for herder groups to address issues of inequalities in herder size within their groups, as well as to regulate livestock numbers, based on the carrying capacity of the ecosystem;



6. Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) should move towards a more comprehensive natural resource management that would include other ecosystems and not just grasslands, following the initial success of community-based pasture management in Mongolia; and
7. Transitional economies such as Mongolia need more time, and more supportive policies in implementing CBNRM.

This Resource Book is produced by the Asian NGO Coalition for Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (ANGOC) angoc@angoc.ngo.ph and the International Land Coalition (ILC) coalition@ifad.org.