

CASE STUDY 15: EBA PROJECT - MONGOLIA

EBA for “Great Steppes” Forward in Adaptation

Mongolia is a country of nomads. Although 60% of the 2.9-million population now lives in towns, nearly 40% of the population are reliant on subsistence livestock herding which still dominates the rural scenery. Indeed, 75% of the country’s territory is covered by steppe grasslands used for pasture. But people’s lives are not easy. Around half of Mongolia’s 200,000+ herding families are living well below the poverty line.

In the grassland landscapes of the Altai and Eastern Steppe regions, both part of the Global 500 Ecoregions characterised by unique ecosystems and biodiversity, the older generations have witnessed clear environmental changes over recent decades. Wildlife numbers have decreased significantly and the pasture conditions are much poorer. Many streams and lakes have dried up. The direct cause of pasture degradation is overgrazing, resulting from a doubling of livestock numbers in the last 30 years spurred by the transition from communism to a market-oriented economy in 1990. Less herders practice traditional rotational grazing, moving seasonally in search of good pasture, leaving time for other pasturelands to recover.

Herders have also noticed a marked change in rainfall patterns and an increase in temperatures. The hydrological regime has also changed, altering the volume and timing of river flow and flood regimes. The soil infiltration rate and water storage capacity have declined, resulting in deteriorating pasture quality and quantity, and vice versa. In addition, the occurrence of summer droughts and extremely severe winter weather events called *dzud* has increased. The 2010 *dzud* killed over 25% of the livestock in the whole country, impacting 700,000 people. Changes in climatic patterns are already having noticeable impacts on the herders, exacerbating already serious land degradation problems.

“Good pasture and water mean everything to us,” says a 23-year-old herder from the Altai region. “Without them, we cannot exist.” The aerial shot of the Altai region testifies to his point. For people living in this landscape, there is simply no livelihood if the surface water and pasture disappear. And for these resources to continue to be available for the present and future generations, it is essential to ensure that the ecosystems in these landscapes which provide water and nurture pasture remain healthy and resilient enough to cope with climate change.

The Project “Ecosystem Based Adaptation Approach to Maintaining Water Security in Critical Water Catchments in Mongolia”, co-funded by the Adaptation Fund, the Government of Mongolia and UNDP (US\$ 10.57 million in total), addresses exactly this. It aims to support the government and local communities to maintain water provisioning services



supplied by mountain and steppe ecosystems by internalising climate change risks within land and water resource management regimes. The project applies the principles of Ecosystem-based

Adaptation (EBA) - a range of strategies for managing ecosystems to increase resilience and maintain essential ecosystem services and reduce the vulnerability of people and the natural environment to climate change impacts.

Working with communities, local and national governments and NGOs in the Altai and Eastern Steppe landscapes, the project supports integration of ecosystem resilience into land use and water resource planning and management at the landscape level. It supports evidence-based decision making through improved knowledge and understanding on ecosystem dynamics and resilience and impact of different land uses. The project also assists community actions to implement EBA principles and practices for the long-term sustenance of their livelihoods. At the national level, the project supports mainstreaming of the EBA approach in the country's adaptation framework and related sector policies. The project marks great steps forward for safeguarding the world's largest Steppe ecosystem and its keepers!

For more information, visit:

<http://undp.adaptationlearning.net/projects/af-mongolia>

