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“World Food System —
A Contribution from Europe”

Mongolia - Pasture Ecosystem Management Project (Green Gold)

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Abstract

Mongolia's pastureland, which accounts for four-fifths of the country's 1.5 million square kilometre area and is the backbone of rural economy, is not in good shape. Experts estimate that 70–80 % of pastureland is degraded. While climate change is thought to be a contributing factor, overgrazing is the primary cause, and this has primarily been due to the opening up of access to pastureland after the 1990 transition which saw pasture go from being a state-controlled resource to a common resource.

The Green Gold Project focuses on fostering collective action among herders to enforce a community based regulated and controlled use of their common pastures. The main approach being taken is facilitating the formation of Pasture-User Groups (PUGs) comprised of herders who have received the right to manage pastures in their traditional grazing areas by the local government. This includes designating seasonal pasture rotations and developing technical and organisational pasture-management plans. PUGs are autonomous bodies supported by local governments, and receiving technical advice and financial support for their start-up. PUGs support and link two interests of herders; long term interests of preserving their pastures and short term interests of earning decent income to sustain their livelihoods. Herder communities have embraced the concept, and there has been a growing demand for assistance to form such groups.

In Khovd Aimag (Province), in Western Mongolia, the process of forming and institutional development of PUGs is well advanced so that at Soum (District) level PUGs have come together as an association and negotiated Soum pasture management plans. To be able to regulate and control open access grazing and in the future hopefully also to limit animal numbers, this process is planned also at Aimag and later at national level.

Furthermore, a more sustainable use of Mongolia's pastures also results in increased carbon sequestration. A pre-feasibility analysis indicates that the PUG system has an immense potential for soil carbon sequestration and that through the international carbon market additional incomes could be generated for Mongolia's herders.

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