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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

## Current Living Status and Social Use of Livestock in Nomadic Herders' Communities in Western Mongolia

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### Abstract

Nomadic herders in Mongolia are facing ongoing climatic and socio-economic changes, but little is known how these affect their livelihood and risk management strategies. This study was conducted to fill this knowledge gap.

Data collection consisted of 50 structured “face to face” interviews of individual households (HH) carried out in Khovd and Bayan Ölgii Province, western Mongolia. These were distributed across four settlements on high altitude summer pastures (> 2000 m a.s.l.) which were visited during 24/06 – 20/08/2013.

The four locations (Alztai Holoo, Sunkar Nuur, Hoshoot, and Dont-Temult) were mainly inhabited by the three ethnic groups of Kazakh, Torguud, and Uriankhai. Based on their total livestock possession (herd size), HHs were subdivided into large, medium and small livestock keepers (L, M, S). Herd size was >200 head for L, >100 – 200 head for M and <100 head for S. These differences were largely paralleled by ethnic divides whereby Torguud dominated the L stratum (70 %) and had a higher living status as well as a more powerful socio-economic status than Kazakh and Uriankhai. The later made up for 90 % of HHs in the S cluster. In 2012 a HH consumed on average 15.6 head of mostly sheep and goats (plus occasionally one calf), whereby L and M slaughtered 22.3 and 20.9 animals compared to only 13.1 slaughtered by S. Across all herds and species, an average of 78.3 animals were born in L herds in 2012, 47.5 in M and 15.2 in S herds. HHs of stratum S (67 % of all HH) consumed 86 % of their annual stock increase and might face severe problems of food security at times of crisis such as disease outbreaks or harsh winters. As a consequence of their tight living conditions, the social use of livestock for donation and exchange that used to firmly bind kinship and neighbour relationships is vanishing, especially among S households.

Strategies are urgently needed that open up new livelihood options without compromising herders' mobility and (food) culture.

**Keywords:** Food security, livestock, Mongolia, social customs