Land Leases to Semi-Nomadic Herders in Peri-Urban Areas of Mongolia

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Sector(s): Agriculture

Fieldwork: Millenium Challenge Corporation (MCC)

Location: Peri-Urban Rangeland Site throughout Mongolia, concentrated in the areas around Ulaanbaatar, Erdenet, and Darkhan.

Sample: 330 herder groups (a total of 868 households)

Target group: Agricultural traders

Outcome of interest: Earnings and income Productivity

Intervention type: Training Sustainable farming

In the last two decades, large numbers of Mongolian herders have migrated to the outskirts of the country's major cities, which has led to conflicts over land and overgrazing of common pastureland. Herders may change their herding practices to better sustain the land if they own rights to it, which could also translate into bigger and healthier animals, and more income for the herders. In this study, carried out near two cities in Mongolia, researchers evaluated the impact of private property rights on land use and herder income.

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Animal herding has been the major source of income and a way of life for rural people in Mongolia for thousands of years, and nomadic and semi-nomadic herders still make up a third of the population.[1] Since the transition to a market economy in the 1990s, the number of livestock in Mongolia has more than doubled, putting a strain on the common use grasslands in peri-urban areas. Overgrazing has led to severe degradation of the rangeland on which these herders depend. Property rights may help address the problem of land degradation as people may be more motivated to conserve the renewable resources on land they have exclusive use. If herders are granted long-term rights to the land, including the ability to exclude use by other herder groups, they may have greater incentives to reduce over-grazing and make long-term investments in the land and their herds. More productive pastureland could also translate into bigger and healthier animals, and increased income for the herders.

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The Millennium Challenge Account-Mongolia, the partner in this study, launched the Peri-Urban Rangeland Project (PURP) to conserve pastureland in peri-urban areas by granting exclusive-use leases to herding groups. Since private ownership of land is new in Mongolia, part of the project's goal was to serve as a proof of concept that private pastureland rights can lead to sustainable land management and improved outcomes for the herders. The project, which consists of leasing rights, material support, and training, targets semi-nomadic herders groups who lived in areas surrounding two Mongolian cities, Choibalsan and

Kharkhorin.



Semi-nomadic herders on horses herding sheep and goats in Mongolia.

Photo credit: Hang Dinh

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In this five-year study, researchers are measuring the impact of the Peri-Urban Rangeland Project (PURP) on herder income and land quality (as measured by pastureland productivity).

Through a lottery, 165 herder groups—with two to seven households in each group—were randomly assigned to receive exclusive grazing rights to a section of pastureland for fifteen years. The same number of herder groups were also randomly assigned to serve as a comparison group. Herders selected to receive exclusive grazing rights were also offered material support in the form of well construction, seeds for growing fodder plants, and materials for building fencing or animal shelters. The material assistance was donated up front, but approximately 50 percent of the cost was required to be repaid by the group over a period of 15 years. The groups also received free training on veterinary care, productive breeds of cows, sustainable pastureland management, and proper preparation for harsh winters.

Researchers are measuring the impact of the PURP program on herder income and land productivity. Productivity is measured using grass clippings at different times of the year for three years.

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Project ongoing, results forthcoming.

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1. World Bank. “Protecting Mongolian Herders Against Livestock Losses.” March 2, 2010. http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2010/03/01/protecting-mongolian-herders-against-livestock-losses