

Evaluation Summary

Linking improvements in nomadic herding practices to the production of sustainable cashmere in the Gobi Desert

Country: Mongolia

Theme: Forests and agricultural land

Reviewer: **Oréade-Brèche**

Date of review: **July 2019**

Key data of FFEM support

Project name: Sustainable Cashmere

Project number: CMN 1000FFEM

Funding amount: 1,200,000 euros

Date of award: 3 December 2014

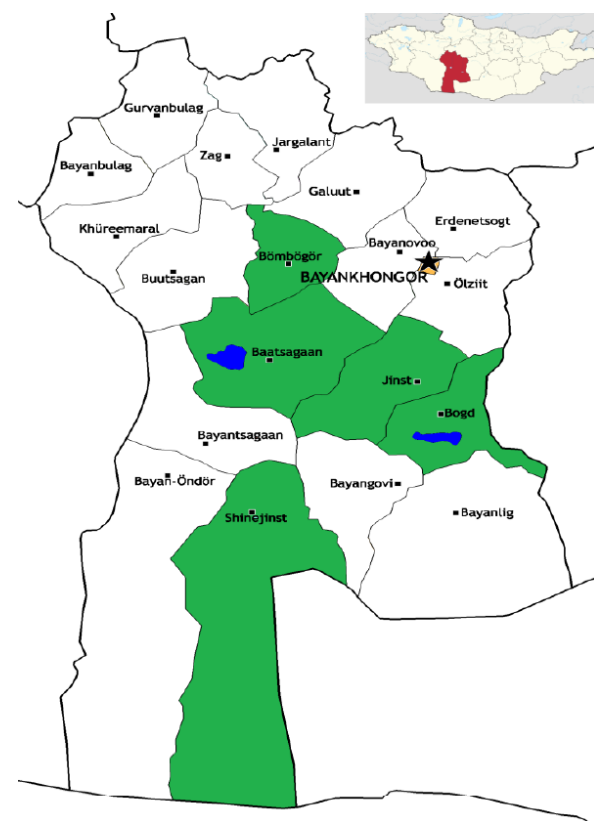
Duration: 5 years (2015–2019)

Context

Against a backdrop of significant economic challenges facing the livestock sector (Mongolia's second-largest economic sector); an imbalance in the pastoral system; and following market deregulation and the exponential growth in livestock numbers (particularly goats); significant pressure on grassland resources, exacerbated by climate change; and the virtual inaction of the Mongolian authorities in regulating the sector; the aim of this project was to combat environmental degradation by enhancing the capacity of local stakeholders in the management of pastures (pastoral resources, herd management, water points, etc.) and the value addition of products, through the development of a 'sustainable cashmere' supply chain.

Stakeholders and procedure

Agronomes et Vétérinaires Sans Frontières acted as the project owner and project manager. To carry out certain activities, it drew on the support of livestock farmers' federations and cooperatives. Furthermore, a large proportion of the activities were carried out in collaboration with the decentralised departments of the Ministry of Agriculture, the VABUs (Veterinary and Animal Breeding Units). Finally, other partners were involved, particularly from Europe, providing support in areas such as marketing and adaptive pasture management.



Objectives

To combat the degradation of pastureland in the Gobi Desert whilst proposing the development of a sustainable cashmere supply chain that respects the environment in which it is produced.

Specific objectives:

- Implementation and dissemination of improved nomadic livestock farming practices
- Capacity-building for local non-state actors to promote sustainable agriculture and agricultural production
- Establishment of a sustainable cashmere supply chain
- Project management and dissemination of results.

Evaluation results

Relevance

The relevance analysis shows that this project addressed genuine challenges at national level, notably the explosion in the livestock population, which has led to chronic overgrazing across more than three-quarters of the country. The project's activities were fully aligned with those set out in the national plans for livestock farming and the livestock sector. In this respect, its implementation effectively addressed a pressing need in the country, particularly in the Gobi Desert region, where climate change is making conditions increasingly precarious, in a country where 50 per cent of the working population depends on livestock farming.

Coherence

The project was also judged to be very well-structured, comprising complementary components ranging from the improvement of farmers' practices and the introduction of collective pasture management by the farmers themselves, the creation of genuine herders' cooperatives, the establishment of a union to manage marketing, the identification of European buyers willing to pay a premium in exchange for the assurance of sustainable sourcing, and finally the establishment of a credible certification scheme – a first in Mongolia.

Effectiveness

The effectiveness analysis showed that the project was well designed and implemented. It led to:

- The creation of 75 pasture user groups (PUGs), and the development of their management plans (for 57 per cent of them) and their registration with the authorities,
- The creation of 5 cooperatives (one per soum) and the launch of their operations for the collection and sorting of sustainable cashmere. The creation of the Union of Cooperatives, the recruitment of its director and the launch of its operations, in particular to supply identified luxury clients in Europe, as well as Mongolian clients,
- The creation and implementation, on a pilot basis, of a 'sustainable cashmere' certification scheme covering all stages of the supply chain.

Efficiency

The project was deemed efficient in that it succeeded in securing co-funding to cover the posts and, furthermore, carried out all activities on schedule and provided a highly accurate and well-documented monitoring system covering the implementation and impact of the project.

Impact

The impacts are not yet fully apparent as the project is still in its early stages, but the Mongolian authorities have clearly identified it as a model to be replicated on a large scale and in other regions of the country. Furthermore, certification to this standard could have a direct impact on pasture management.

Viability/Sustainability

Sustainability, in particular, the ability of the schemes put in place to operate independently, was deemed to be mixed. Whilst the GUPs are still a relatively new scheme, issues relating to governance and financial autonomy were noted amongst the cooperatives. Local authorities, for their part, appeared to have genuinely taken the cooperative system set up by AVSF as a model, and the rate of adoption of new practices throughout the supply chain (livestock farmers, GUPs, cooperatives, the Union) is indicative of the effectiveness of capacity-building.

Added value of the FFEM

The key factors contributing to the FFEM's added value were as follows: flexibility in implementation; the value of discussions with the teams carrying out the evaluation and assessing the feasibility of a new project; and support for innovation, which enabled the initiative to be scaled up to other areas.

Lessons learned & recommendations

The main recommendations focused on the design of a second phase of this project.

As not all stakeholders had yet fully embraced all the new concepts introduced by the project, the evaluators advised against expanding the project area too much, as work in the first five sub-areas still needed to be further developed (e.g. to date, only 19 GUPs out of the 75 created are members of the cooperatives). Translated with DeepL.com (free version)

The weak point in the programme's design remained a lack of effective tools for measuring the project's impact on pastures. Thus, even though the Green Gold and adaptive methods had been tested, and the WCS method was to be added to the range of field tools, it seemed essential that:

- The robustness of the method be strengthened so as to make it as uncontroversial as possible,
- The number of test sites be significantly increased to establish a true picture of conditions on the ground based on a credible sampling rate during certification,
- These surveys could in future be combined with satellite monitoring to move from individual survey points to maps highlighting differences in management practices between areas.

Finally, as a law on grazing land was taking some time to come into force, it seemed that the opportunity to use the 'sustainable cashmere' certification scheme as a tool for controlling herd sizes should be seized. A mechanism limiting certifiable herds to a specific size (e.g. 600 goats) could be considered. A second group (for example, between 600 and 1,000 goats) could be placed (provided the other criteria are met) in a 'transition' category, with a premium per kilo equal to one-third or one-quarter of that paid for 'sustainable cashmere' certification. Finally, farmers with more than 1,000 animals would not be eligible for the scheme. It appears that, given the current herd sizes in the area, this system could work and bring herd numbers back to densities closer to the carrying capacity of the pastures.

