



Process case study

Protecting the livelihoods of herders from a *dzud* winter in Mongolia

Background

Raising livestock remains the most important livelihood in Mongolia and is the sole source of income for 35 per cent of households. Summers are very hot and dry and winters bitterly cold. A *dzud* is a very harsh winter, during which the ground is so solidly frozen, under deep and firm snow, that animals cannot reach pasture. Over the past two decades, climate change has made these more severe and more frequent. During the winter of 2017 to 2018, triggered by warnings that extreme weather posed a major risk to livestock herders, early action helped limit the impact of a potential disaster.

Process

In December 2017, USD 290 000 was released from FAO's Early Action Fund for interventions to safeguard livelihoods in order to protect livestock assets in Mongolia. Amongst other activities, such as the purchase of feed concentrates and nutritional supplements, early action funds were earmarked to pay for the controlled slaughter of animals. Meat prices had already begun to drop because of oversupply, as worried herders started to sell their animals rather than try to feed them through a bad winter.

Monitoring and forecasting were combined with social and economic information to closely pinpoint the most at-risk families. These included households with small herds, often run by a single parent, with limited or no social welfare support and poor access to markets or crop-producing land. These at-risk households received money for the carcasses of either goats or sheep, and used it to cover their immediate needs. This included extra human food supplies and the purchase of additional hay and fodder for their remaining animals before the prices spiked as the *dzud* began to bite. The controlled livestock offtake had a second important impact as the meat was distributed to at-risk urban households, living in poor areas on the edges of the capital Ulaanbaatar.

Outcomes

FAO subsequently undertook a Return on Investment analysis of the outcomes of the targeted early actions, evaluating their effectiveness and quantifying the benefits of acting early. The overall cost of the livestock interventions came to USD 285 for each household involved. In return, each one benefitted by USD 2,008, which gives a 7.1 benefit to cost ratio. This included the value of both adult and new-born animals saved, the potential loss of cashmere production, extra milk which was produced, and the drop avoided in the value of livestock due to poor body condition.¹

Among the at-risk urban households, the meat distribution saved them USD 32 over a period of two months when finances were especially stretched.

¹ Note that this figure does not account for the potential income from the sale of the animals if the intervention had not taken place.

Lessons learned

The livestock offtake programme was particularly successful as it reduced herds at the best time – before the peak of the *dzud* – when animals were healthy and livestock prices were still good. The cash allowed the herders to focus on the well-being and productivity of their remaining animals. This, together with the distribution of feed from early February 2018 – ahead of the peak impact of the *dzud* – meant herders could maintain the condition of their remaining animals and sell their goat cashmere in early spring, for higher prices.

Source: FAO (2018) Mongolia, Impact of early warning and early action. Rome. 32pp. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO. www.fao.org/3/ca2181en/CA2181EN.pdf

LEGS case studies demonstrate good practice in livestock emergency response. They cover the six LEGS Technical Intervention areas, the eight LEGS Principles as well as the broader contexts covered in the third edition of the LEGS handbook. **Process case studies** illustrate the application of LEGS guidance and **impact case studies** reflect on the outcomes of LEGS interventions.

- ▶ You can access all of the LEGS case studies at livestock-emergency.net/resources/case-studies
- ▶ For more information see the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards Handbook at livestock-emergency.net

