

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS, LAND REFORM AND GLOBALISATION IN MONGOLIA.

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ABSTRACT

Management of Common Pool Resources (CPRs) today cannot be considered in isolation from the phenomenon of globalisation. In this paper results of recent field research and analysis of academic and policy documents are used as a basis to explore the relationships between global discourses, development policy, academic theory and local realities in Mongolia. It is argued that discourses such as the Tragedy of the Commons and biodiversity conservation have become increasingly important in Mongolia since decollectivisation of the herding economy and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. This paper further argues that such discourses frequently override consideration of local realities, variability and institutional complexity when applied in pastoral areas in general and in the Mongolian context in particular. They have recently been used in support of land reform arguments in Mongolia, which at their most extreme have advocated privatisation of land. The links between ideas of people-environment relations underlying these key discourses are assessed. Through examination of case study material relating particularly to biodiversity conservation current theories concerning enabling conditions for collective action at the local level and the role of development interventions are challenged.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on developmental discourse as an aspect of globalisation. It explores the interdependence of particular discourses with respect to the Mongolian pastoral commons and their relationship to local realities.

In the paper I argue that since decollectivisation and the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990's the Mongolian pastoral sector and herding population have become subject to new, global, discursive practices. The political space opened up by the dismantling of the architecture of the communist state, and in particular the collectivised herding sector, has been occupied at least in part by international developmental discourses, particularly those pertaining to land reform, desertification and biodiversity conservation, all of which have concerns with people-environment relations at their core.

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On closer examination it is not difficult to detect the spectre of Garret Hardin's infamous 'Tragedy of the Commons', underlying and linking these concerns (Hardin, 1968²).

This paper therefore seeks to illuminate the Mongolian experience of a global process: the widespread replication and implementation of western developmental discourses as part of the phenomena of globalisation. In particular it focuses on theories of Common Pool Resource (CPR) management and biodiversity conservation and their expression in developmental discourse. Due to its preceding 70 years of virtual isolation prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent plethora of external development initiatives, which have provoked an accelerated engagement with issues such as biodiversity conservation, Mongolia is a particularly fruitful location in which to consider these issues and illuminate the workings of global developmental discourses. Furthermore, Mongolia has one of the largest areas of common grazing land in the world, with one third of the population directly reliant on nomadic pastoralism for their livelihoods (Bruun et al, 2001). Therefore, theoretical and policy debates concerning the management of CPRs are particularly pertinent in the everyday lives of the Mongolian people.

This paper therefore aims to examine both theory and policy with respect to the Mongolian pastoral commons.

First of all it aims to contribute to the theoretical debate concerning the nature of effective institutions for collective action and conditions under which they occur. It does so in a number of ways. Section 2 of the paper presents a very brief summary of current ideas and theories in CPR management. It also provides a general overview of issues concerning implementation of such theories in development practice. Section 3 summarises recent historical developments in Mongolian pastoralism, with particular reference to institutions involved in management of this particular CPR. A more in depth assessment of the post-decollectivisation situation, as set out in recent academic literature, is presented and key factors assessed in the light of CPR theory. Material from a case study is presented in Section 6, and recent institutional developments evaluated in the light of this theoretical framework.

Secondly, the paper examines the impact of discourse in development interventions in pastoral areas, with particular reference to Mongolia. Sections 4 and 5 explore the assumptions concerning people-environment relations which underlie developmental discourses related to land reform and to biodiversity conservation respectively. The constructions of the herding community in relation to nature, which appear to inform key policy documents, are considered in the Mongolian context. Specifically, representations of the post-decollectivisation situation contained in international advice to the Mongolian Government are contrasted with views presented in the academic literature of the same period in Section 4. The biodiversity conservation discourse discussed in Section 5 is compared to the implementation of a particular project on the ground, as presented in the case study material in Section 6.

² The core of Hardin's thesis is encapsulated in the following quotation (Hardin, 1968, p. 1244), 'The tragedy of the commons develops in this way. Picture a pasture open to all. It is to be expected that each herdsman will try to keep as many cattle as possible on the commons...As a rational being, each herdsman seeks to maximise his gain ...But this is the conclusion reached by each and every rational herdsman sharing a commons. Therein is the tragedy...Ruin is the destination towards which all men rush, each pursuing his own interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons?'

The case study material therefore links the two themes of biodiversity conservation and collective action for CPR management which run through this paper. The case study focuses on a particular National Park and a recent international conservation and development project in the area. This material is used to explore and illuminate a number of the above themes. Through consideration of the understandings, expectations and goals of the various stakeholders, it illustrates the extent to which a particular, theoretically participatory, project's goals reflect those of the local herders or the extent to which they appear to be determined by a preset agenda originating in a global biodiversity discourse. Institutional issues in CPR theory are also considered and illuminated by the case study material, as the development intervention has provoked significant changes in the local institutional framework.

The paper is based on 10 months of field research I undertook in Mongolia between October 2000 and September 2001 and on assessment of relevant academic literature, reports and recommendations of development bodies, and government policy documents. The field research included key informant interviews with policy makers, government officials and donors, in addition to household questionnaires, in depth interviews, collation of oral histories and participant observation with the herding community at a case study site in southern Mongolia.

2.0 CPR THEORY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT PRACTICE

Much CPR scholarship in recent years has focused on refuting Hardin's influential Tragedy of the Commons thesis. This has typically been undertaken through documenting the existence and efficacy of primarily local institutions for CPR management in particular case study areas and seeking to identify 'design principles' which characterise effective and enduring local institutions on this basis. Such 'design principles' have in effect become a blueprint for development agencies seeking to create robust institutions at the local level. Ostrom's work has been central in the development of these 'design principles'. These were initially defined as clear boundaries of the resource and its users; existence of appropriation and provision rules and their congruence with local conditions; collective choice arrangements by which individual affected by the operational rules could participate in modifying them; monitoring; graduated sanctions and conflict resolution mechanisms and recognition of local rights to organise by external governmental authorities (Ostrom, 1990)³. Although Ostrom has explicitly stated that *'there is no blueprint that can be used to create effective local institutions'* (Ostrom, 1995, p.43), these design principles have acquired a prescriptive status (Steins et al, 2000). Therefore, even where the Tragedy of the Commons discourse has been refuted, it appears to have often been superseded in development policy by commitment to an equally abstract generalised understanding of CPR management issues as implicit in such blueprints.

However, the functionalist view of incentives for collective action, and the underlying assumptions of actors' economic rationality which inform the above principles, have been challenged by calls in recent academic literature for a distinct, more 'ethnographic' perspective. This is a perspective which explicitly recognises both the embeddedness of

³ See Ostrom (1990) for more detailed explanation of these principles and also an eighth principle related to CPRs that are part of larger systems.

particular institutions within specific social, cultural and historical frameworks and the wider symbolic or cultural value of institutions which may only incidentally impact on CPR management⁴. While this more complex, ‘embedded’ notion of local institutions which have a role in CPR management is a theoretical advance, it clearly has problematic implications for both policy and development interventions. As Cleaver (2000) states, such ideas call into question the endeavour to render social relations and categories of meaning and values in local resource systems legible and transparent, an endeavour which appears to have been integral to many development interventions associated with CPR management in the past. This recent ‘ethnographic’ perspective on local institutions, or notion of such institutions as ‘*embodiments of social process*’ (Cleaver, 2001, p.365), appears to undermine development agencies’ requirements for blueprints for creation of effective institutions. This has important implications for future development interventions as it may require sponsoring agencies to accept the inability of interventions to produce predictable or ‘desired’ outcomes or states (ibid).

I argue that recent work by Agrawal and Gibson (1999) illuminates this debate. They have called for development agencies to focus on institutions as opposed to an aggregate, homogenous notion of community in implementing community based natural resource management (CBNRM) projects. They define institutions as ‘*sets of formal and informal rules and norms that shape interactions of humans with others and nature*’ (p.637)⁵ and explicitly recognise the flexible, often overlapping and provisional nature of such institutions (ibid). I argue that the dichotomy they create between ‘communities’ and ‘institutions’ parallels the differing views on institutions for CPR management put forward by the ‘institutional economics’ school and the ‘ethnographic’ school, as discussed above. An institutional, or ‘ethnographic’ focus on the part of development agencies is described by Agrawal and Gibson as both more political and more realistic than a ‘community’ focus. However, they explicitly recognise the likelihood of uncertainty concerning the outcome of development interventions implicit in such an approach.

Therefore, developments in CPR theory are intertwined with policy debates and issues surrounding project implementation, particularly with reference to the notion of community based management of resources and participation. This paper argues that there is an innate tension between academic scholarship, local realities and development agencies, whose interests and actions arguably often take place in relation to meta narratives or powerful developmental discourses, despite their at least theoretical commitment to participation. In explanation of the persistence of such discourses Mosse (1997, p.471) states that ‘*Only certain models of common property management are easily compatible with centralised development planning systems*’. Therefore, while such discourses still inform thinking about project implementation at a local level, it appears that true participation cannot be achieved, despite the widespread commitment of agencies to this notion and despite the developments of CPR theory which indicate that a true understanding of local institutions must imply relinquishing of pre set objectives.

These ideas are explored further with respect to the case study material in Section 6. This examines the extent to which a particular development project has sought to engage with

⁴ For example in Cleaver (2001, 2000), Steins (2001). The ‘design principles’ have also been criticised for the underlying assumption of a single use resource and neglect of external, contextual factors, for example in Steins et al (2000).

⁵ This definition of institutions is adopted throughout the current paper.

local institutions, as opposed to operationalising a blueprint for the creation of 'successful' local institutions. The wider persistence and fluctuating influence of discourse at the national policy level is explored in Section 4.

3.0 INSTITUTIONS, LAND REFORM AND THE TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS

In Section 3.1 I present a brief summary of socio political and institutional changes with respect to Mongolian herding practice in the 20th century, with particular reference to pasture use rights and as a necessary prerequisite to consideration of the post-decollectivisation situation. Conclusions regarding the state of pastoralism and key issues following decollectivisation, as presented in recent academic literature, are summarised and common themes highlighted in Section 3.2.

3.1 Mongolian Pastoralism in the 20th Century – Land Rights, Rules and Institutions

It is not possible to even attempt to understand the current situation with respect to pastoralism in Mongolia and the widespread perceptions of this situation on the part of government bodies and donor agencies without considering its recent history. A number of authors have produced typologies of pastoralism in the 20th century, subdivided on the basis of changing political and administrative organisation at the state level, and corresponding changes in land use regulation, tenure, land use patterns and pastoral institutions. These typically recognise four main periods: a pre revolutionary period (pre 1920's), pre-collectivisation (1920's–1950's), collective period (1950's–1980's) and decollectivisation or privatisation period (1990's onwards), although details of the precise subdivisions vary among authors⁶.

In the pre revolutionary period Mongolia was subdivided into administrative areas or fiefs called banners or '*hoshuu*', each ruled by a hereditary lord or Buddhist monastery, with these areas being further subdivided into smaller administrative districts of *sums* or *bags* (Sneath, 2000, Mearns, 1996, 1993). Land use was organised and regulated by these authorities, with subjects required to look after the often large, specialised herds of the noble or ecclesiastical authorities. Most also looked after their own private animals. Pastoralism at this time was therefore a two-tier system, with both yield focused and domestic subsistence spheres (Sneath, 2002b). Herders gained access to pasture through use rights conferred by the *hoshuu* ruler and authorities and, within the smaller administrative districts, on the basis of custom. However, boundaries between the customary areas of different herding groups were typically imprecise and subject to renegotiation (Sneath, 2000). Therefore, both formal rules and organisations concerning pasture use and informal, customary institutions were important to herders in varying degrees in gaining access to pasture, although available information indicates the predominance of informal institutions in daily life and within allocated territories. During this period land was considered to be ultimately owned by the Manchu Emperor prior to 1911, then subsequently by the Bogd Khan, the highest ranking lama (Sneath, 2000, Mearns, 1993).

The 1921 communist revolution may be considered as the first significant change in the socio political framework, with erosion of the power of the monasteries and nobles and redistribution of livestock among the poorest households. The pastoral economy therefore gradually came to be based on small, low productivity family herds, with the effective removal of the upper yield focused sphere, represented by the large landowners

⁶ Only a brief outline of the main historical forms of pastoral organisation in 20th century Mongolia is presented here. See Sneath (2000) for detailed analysis of land use rights under the different socio-political regimes. Also, Sneath (2002a, 2002b) and Volker–Muller and Bold (1996).

and the monastic authorities and corresponding erosion of their role in control of pasture use. Land ownership also officially passed to the state in this period, following the formation of the Mongolian People's Republic in 1924 (Mearns, 1993). Gradual restrictions on long-distance movements occurred during this period, with the abolition of the *hoshuu* administrative unit in the 1930's and replacement by smaller administrative units. Attempts to collectivise the herding sector in the 1920's and 1930's failed in the face of stiff opposition. However, this programme was finally successfully implemented in the 1950's, following the gradual development of a co-operative movement in the 1930's and 1940's and the introduction of a limit on private livestock numbers in 1955, to provide additional incentives for herders to join fledgling collectives (Mearns, 1996). Collectivisation was completed by 1959.

Between 1959 and 1990 almost all rural dwellers were members of a collective (*negdel*) or state farm (*sangin aj ahui*), within which only limited private ownership of animals was permitted and the majority belonged to the collective. Pastoral society at this stage was an important contributor to the national economy and generated over 40% of GDP in the 1980's. The collective period therefore essentially saw the reintroduction of the yield-focused sphere, which had previously operated under the pre revolutionary neo feudal system. Parallels can be also be drawn between these two periods with respect to centralised control systems which regulated use of pasture, duties owed by the herders to such organisations and the simultaneous existence of domestic subsistence with this yield focused sphere which was typically based on specialised, single species herds (Sneath, 2000)⁷.

Decollectivisation associated with the collapse of the Soviet Union commenced in 1991 and was completed throughout the country by 1993. This obviously resulted in the removal of the regulation of pastureland undertaken by the collective. Land remained in state ownership, but most of the livestock and collective property were privatised to former collective members⁸.

3.2. Pastoralism in Post-Decollectivisation Mongolia – Incipient ‘Tragedy’ or Growth and Adaptation?

Key issues pertaining to pastoralism following the privatisation of the collectives and as identified in recent academic literature are assessed below. They are considered in relation to CPR theory.

Customary and Formal Institutions

Consensus of academic opinion in the immediate post-decollectivisation situation indicates that herders were reverting to closer ‘traditional’ or kin based units for co-

⁷ Detailed consideration of the extent to and manner in which customary, informal rules and institutions persisted within the overarching state structure in collective times is largely absent from the literature, although a number of authors do comment on this, for example Mearns (1993), Potkanski (1993). Analysis of pasture use institutions and controls in the period following the revolution, but prior to collectivisation is also largely absent. This period is considered important in analysis of pasture use institutions due to a number of parallels to the current situation: removal of upper, yield focused sphere and more formal institutional controls of pasture use, with reversion to domestic subsistence strategies and increased reliance on informal institutions. Detailed analysis of historical tensions and interactions between customary and formal institutions will form the focus of a future paper.

⁸ A proportion of property of the former collectives became the basis of newly formed companies or co-operatives. See Sneath, (2002b) and Potkanski, (1993).

operation e.g. *khot ail*⁹ (Potkanski, 1993). Comparable groupings had been present in pre-collective times, and also arguably in a modified form in collective times, when the *suur* became the basic herding unit in most areas¹⁰. On the basis of this re-emergence of autonomous co-operation following decollectivisation, Volker Muller and Bold (1996, p. 39) state that '*it would be wrong to speak of chaotic conditions in pasture utilisation in the period 1993-1995*'. Enkh-Amgalan (2000, p.17) concurs that '*the privatisation of livestockled to traditional customary regulations re-emerging actively. At present, they continue to work well*', although with the proviso that such regulations will need the support of new, formal land tenure systems in order to cope with new challenges.

However, a prevailing theme of uncertainty, instability and increasing divergence of interests in the pastoral sector is also evident from academic writings in the early post-decollectivisation years. In the terminology of CPR theory, this is presented as uncertainty among pastoralists with respect to behaviour of other herders, in other words an assurance problem, and the potential for this to lead to free riding behaviour (Mearns, 1996, 1993). While customary principles and norms of pasture use were recognised as still being in existence at that time, they were perceived as being weakened and under threat. As Fernandez-Gimenez and Batbuyan (2000, abstract) state '*with the dismantling of herding collectives in Mongolia in 1992, formal regulatory institutions for allocating pasture vanished, and weakened customary institutions were unable effectively to fill the void*'.

While some resurgence of 'traditional' institutions has therefore been reported at the household level, the history of attempts to create 'higher level' institutional structures such as co-operatives (*horshoo*) in the immediate post-decollectivisation period is largely one of failure. According to Sneath (2002b) this was due not only to the adverse financial climate of the time, but the lack of institutional depth of such groups. Unlike the previous collectives or pre-collective monasteries or nobility, they were economic units only, without social or political roles or obligations for members. Therefore, members tended to revert to the household or *khot ail* in times of difficulty (ibid).

The role of higher-level administrative structures such as the sum and bag is little discussed in the literature for this period. Bruun et al (2001) state that the public regulation of pasture was discontinued in the market society.

New Herders and Free Riders

The phenomenon of urban-rural migration has also been widely recognised in the literature as an important contributory factor to pasture use problems. This was particularly evident in the immediate post-decollectivisation years, although the importance of this issue over a longer time period is illustrated by the fact that the number of herding households doubled between 1992 and 1997 (Mearns and Dulamdary, 2000). The movement of former support and technical staff of the collective and other

⁹ *Khot ail* have been described in the literature as '*the customary herding group among Mongol pastoralists*', (Potkanski, 1993), and a '*grouping of livestock keeping families*', (Bold, 1996). They are characteristically flexible and informal. For more detailed analyses of the nature, structure, function and history of *khot ail*, see Bold (1996), Cooper (1993) and Sneath (2002b).

¹⁰ *Suur* have been depicted as comparable to *khot ail*, but Bold (1996, p 75) contends that '*the suur was an institution neither structurally nor functionally comparable to the Khot-Ail, rather an administration-oriented, rudimentary form of this*'. Important differences include lack of independence of the *suur* group and, in some cases, weakened kinship ties within *suur* groups as a result of deliberate collective policy.

newly unemployed urban dwellers to the country, following receipt of livestock in the privatisation process on the part of the former group, has been portrayed in the literature as contributing to problems for a number of reasons. These are reported as their inexperience, tendency to remain close to town centres, thus causing overgrazing and congestion in such areas, and increased tendency to free ride due to their lack of integration into local communities and their associated lower 'opportunity costs' with respect to free riding behaviour (Mearns, 1996, 1993). Potkanski and Szykiewicz (1993), writing on the basis of data gathered during the immediate post-decollectivisation period, predict increased free riding in the future due to the disorganisation of state institutions and influx of unskilled people or those with alien values to herding areas.

An increased incidence of absentee herding has also been reported in the literature and related to decollectivisation and the new herders phenomenon. A proportion of people who acquired livestock on privatisation have reportedly remained in urban areas and sent their livestock to relatives or other households for herding on a permanent basis (Fernandez-Gimenez, 1999), or have become part time herders only and followed the above strategy in other seasons. Another contributory factor is the reported return to their family's customary pastures, following decollectivisation, of some herders, who were displaced to new territories by the collective, thus resulting in voluntary redistribution of customary seasonal pastures (Potkanski and Szykiewicz, 1993).

Relative sedentarisation of the herding population in the post-decollectivisation period has been noted by some observers, and related not only to difficulties maintaining movements in the absence of the motorised transport previously provided by the collective, but also to increased free riding. According to Bazagur et al (1993) some herders have adopted a previously unknown defensive strategy against free riders, by staying in their winter and spring pastures for all four seasons. Fernandez-Gimenez (1998) also reports a decrease in mobility and an increase in year-round use of certain pastures, on the basis of a case study in western Mongolia.

Increased wealth differentiation among herders has also been reported as a phenomenon in the post-decollectivisation period (Mearns and Dulamdary, 2000).

Overgrazing

In academic literature the theme of increased pressure on the pasture is predominantly linked to observed sedentarisation, as discussed above, but also to the increasing numbers of livestock on the pasture¹¹. This has been attributed to both the increased number of pastoral households and reduced offtake of animal products, as marketing of such products has become increasingly problematic since decollectivisation. Also herders have reportedly been concerned with increasing livestock numbers to provide food security as part of a subsistence strategy. Case study material in Fernandez-Gimenez and Batbuyan (2000) indicates that herders themselves view decline in pasture condition as due to a combination of these factors, with reduced mobility being seen as having greater importance.

¹¹ An increase in numbers in the national herd from 25.9 to 31.9 million head between 1990 and 1998 is reported in Sneath (2002a) on the basis of figures produced by the Statistical Office of Mongolia and Ministry of Agriculture and Industry of Mongolia. However, recent livestock losses in natural disasters (*dzuds*) have seriously impacted livestock numbers, with a reported loss of 3 million livestock in the 1999/2000 winter and spring periods (ibid). Significant livestock losses also occurred in the winter of 2000/2001 and again in 2001/2002.

3.3. CPR Theory and Pastoralism in Post-Decollectivisation Mongolia

Research papers written since the demise of the collectives in Mongolia present a picture of a system under serious stress, as a result of factors such as relative sedentarisation, influx of newcomers to herding and some observed increases in free riding, with greater increases predicted in the future. All of these factors are clearly linked to a presumed decay in the strength of institutional controls of pasture use, namely through the demise of the overarching control of the state sector and the failure of informal, customary institutions to effectively fill this void, as reported by certain researchers.

These problems can be related to Ostrom's 'design principles' for formation of effective local institutions and the functionalist approach to institutions for CPR management (Ostrom, 1990). For example the requirement for expected continuation of interaction, defined user groups, existence of effective sanctions etc are all arguably absent in the Mongolian context following the removal of formal institutional, in this case state, control. In this analysis, a breakdown of existing collective action and incentives for future collective action, in other words an incipient Tragedy of the Commons, may be predicted.

However, this paper argues that a number of factors need to be taken into account at this juncture, which reflect the critiques of this functionalist approach and are more closely related to an appreciation of the ethnographic, socially embedded nature of local institutions. The reported weakness of customary institutions does not mean an absence of such institutions; for example case study material from west-central Mongolia indicates that most herders have tried to retain norms of pasture use, despite increases in out of season grazing and trespassing, apparently associated with the presence of new herders (Fernandez-Gimenez, 1998). Also, the revival of *khot ails* is in contrast to the expectations of the 'design principles' for successful local institutions, as set out on Ostrom (1990), as the above listed factors would seem to mitigate against such re emergence. As stated by Mearns in 1996, and writing on the basis of case study material collected in the immediate post-decollectivisation years, there were contrary indications for the future direction of herding at that time.

Representations of the post-decollectivisation situation in international advice to the Mongolian Government are contrasted with those of the academic literature, as outlined above, in Section 4. This subsequent section of the paper explores the influence of international developmental discourses, as opposed to the conclusions of academic materials based on local research, in such advice. A brief overview of the history of development advice with respect to pastoralists is presented at the outset, as necessary context for the consideration of the Mongolian situation.

4.0. DISCOURSE, POLICY AND PASTORALISM

4.1. The Global Picture

The representation of pastoralists with respect to the environment and land use in developmental discourses has historically played an important role in justifying particular policies and interventions. Furthermore, a vast body of work, particularly by cultural anthropologists, has highlighted the frequently negative effects of development interventions on pastoralists (Fratkin, 1997).

In 1984 Simpson and Sullivan argued that development projects should look at ending common property land tenure in favour of privatisation, which in their view promoted more rational land use for livestock production. Sandford, 1983 (in Fratkin, 1997) sets out what he sees as the mainstream view of pastoral development held by most development and government officials at that time: most of the world's rangelands are suffering from desertification; in most cases this is caused by overgrazing of domestic animals due to an increase in the numbers of such animals; while solutions to desertification exist these are not applied primarily because of pastoralists' systems of communal land tenure and finally that the solution to this involves privatised tenure.

Fratkin (1997, p.236) reflects these views in his statement that the 1970's and 1980s '*was also a period of large scale projects by the international donor community, many of whose policies, driven by the 'tragedy of the commons' thesis, emphasize privatisation of the range, commercial ranching, and sedentarisation of nomads*'. However, his assertion that '*Human-livestock-land interactions are (now) explained less in terms of 'carrying capacity' or 'desertification' and more in terms of loss of common property rights...*' (ibid) appears over optimistic with regard to some key post-decollectivisation policy advice in Mongolia, as cited below and also with respect to aspects of the discussion surrounding desertification¹².

The presumed link between herders' activities and adverse environmental impacts contains implications of 'irrational' or 'primitive' practices. This is illustrated in the notion, closely allied to the Tragedy of the Commons thesis, that practices such as the tendency of individual herders to maximise the size of their herds and increasing numbers both of herders and livestock have led to desertification, with the blame for this being laid squarely at the door of the herders, as a result of their presumed mismanagement (Fratkin, 1997).

These representations of human–environment interactions in the context of the pastoral commons and the notion of herders as agents of environmental destruction are also closely linked to the biodiversity conservation discourse and to justifications for exclusion of herders from Protected Areas.

4.2. The Mongolian Picture

In the Mongolian context the above attitudes are reflected in ADB statements that '*Before 1990, there was little regard for environmental concerns in Mongolia and as a result, the country is seeing increased water and air pollution, deposits of toxic wastes, desertification, deforestation, groundwater depletion, soil erosion, and overgrazing*' (ADB, 2000). In this discourse problems facing the herding sector after decollectivisation are presented in an de-politicised context and constructed as a failure on the part of government and land users prior to 1990¹³, and by extension as a result of

¹² Sneath (2002a) compares data presented by various sources concerning the extent of pasture degradation/overgrazing in Mongolia, with estimates ranging from 7- 70% in 1996. He states that this 'narrative of environmental disaster' has been used to advocate exclusive private rights to land.

¹³ This echoes Sneath's 2002a comment re UNDP Mongolian Environmental Trust Fund's portrayal of the Mongolian Government as lacking competency re issues of transport policy and in need of development expertise.

continuation of such activities on the part of the users of these natural resources, the herders, in the subsequent period¹⁴.

There are also clear echoes of the Tragedy of the Commons discourse in the Asian Development Bank's championing of the private ownership of land to deal with 'land tenure insecurity', which in their view was necessarily linked to '*disincentives to invest in land improvements*', (ADB, 1994, p.33).

This paper argues that such international discourses predominated in international advice to Mongolia until recently. Proceedings from a conference held in 1990, when Mongolia was just commencing its liberalisation process, cite the importance of a two way exchange of knowledge between Mongolia and other pastoral countries and further state that on the basis of the Mongolian experience '*sedentarisation – an ending of nomadic movement – is not a necessary condition for successful pastoral organisation*' (Swift, 1990, p.23). However, examination of particular international advice documents relating to land reform, for example as quoted above, indicate an unwillingness to participate in this bilateral exchange. They indicate rather a tendency to link absence of formal institutions to a lack of institutions, thus creating an overriding view of chaos and confusion and a basis for restating the Tragedy of the Commons. Such notions of crisis can then be used in support of calls for privatisation of land. Policy attempts are now being made in Mongolia to fill what has been portrayed as an institutional void following decollectivisation. As apparent in the history of attempts to influence common property and pastoral resource use in many countries, this has revolved around notion of property rights.

This paper argues that while very serious problems are undeniably present in the herding sector this the narrative of crisis cannot be assumed to be uniformly true for the entire country, and where it is true it may be related more to the natural disasters (*dzuds*) and heavy losses of livestock over the preceding three winters than to failure or weakness of local institutions. It argues that research material, as outlined above, appears to have been neglected or over-generalised in such narratives, thus removing local variations and nuances, with international discourses predominating over local considerations.

It is arguable that international discourses have already caused problems through their role in the actual dismantling of collectives themselves. While certain advisors have argued that the anomaly lies in the fact that the privatisation was not extended to the land itself, some academics have criticised this original act of 'adaptation to the market economy' and suggested that the collectives should just have been reformed¹⁵. As Bazagur et al (1993, p.1) wrote in response to privatisation of collective assets, '*It is important not to forget the lessons learnt from earlier periods. A revolution does not mean that everything which existed or was taken for granted before it should be ignored. The scientifically groundless direction of current policies could have serious consequences...*'.

¹⁴ The ADB is the largest single lender to Mongolia, with UNDP also a major actor and currently helping the government implement a number of environmental conventions such as those on biodiversity and preventing desertification. The World Bank, USAID and Japan are also important donors in Mongolia (Bruun et al, 2001). Further information concerning the main actors in overseas development aid to Mongolia are summarised in Bruun et al, 2001.

They also criticised the collectivisation process for focusing on livestock at the expense of pastureland and ecological considerations and expressed concerns with the likely future direction of land use policy. *'Unfortunately, the new government and other political forces look set to repeat the mistakes of the old regime. They appear to be informed by only a very superficial understanding of the relationships between livestock, herders and pasture land'* (Bazagur et al, 1993, p.7).

It is only in more recent international advice documents and reports to the Government of Mongolia that the approach seems to have undergone an alteration to incorporate a more country specific understanding of changes in pasture use and the influence of customary laws and institutions. The most recent reports on land reform issues, for example Hansted and Duncan (2001), are clearly moving away from the call for private property rights in pastureland and towards group leasing and increased herder participation in policy making and enforcement. The report to the Government of Mongolia by Agriteam Canada on sustainable management of the extensive livestock sector (Agriteam Canada, 1997), refers to altered behaviour of herders in the market economy creating both under and over utilisation of resources and calls for a strategy that can accommodate regional variation, rather than a 'blanket strategy' approach. They recommend group possession of summer and autumn pastures through Grazing Associations, with winter and possibly also spring pastures being possessed by smaller groups such as *khot ail*. Land reform based on strengthening existing informal rights, while maintaining traditions of reciprocity between groups in times of emergency, is also recommended by Enkh-Amgalan (2000), amongst others.

However, the doctrine of the ultimate desirability and inevitability of private land rights still appears to persist in some areas, as in the 1997 report for the ADB TA Project on Strengthening of Land Use Policies in Mongolia (Draft Final Report, GISL/Biotechnology Consultants, as referenced in Agriteam Canada, 1997).

The resolution of pasture use issues appears to have acquired a new urgency in the political arena, following three years of disastrous *dzuds*. This is reflected in the recent national seminar on 'Mongolian Sustainable Grassland Management' organised by the Government of Mongolia and UNDP in October, 2001, which aimed among other things to co ordinate the various bodies working on grassland management issues in Mongolia (UN, 2001). Projects focusing on support and revival of customary forms of herder co-operation include a UNDP pilot project, and an International Development Research Centre, Canada (IDRC) project on behalf of the Ministry of Nature and Environment (MNE/ IDRC, 2001). Pilot co-management schemes are planned, with some form of group tenure arrangements for local herders.

Changes in the legal framework with respect to land use issues are discussed in detail elsewhere and are not restated here¹⁶. It is sufficient to say that the central piece of legislation, the 1994 Land Law, theoretically allows for leasing of campsites and pastures by and allocation of possession contracts to herders, although interpretation of the law is highly variable both among and between the implementing local government agencies and herders themselves (Fernandez-Gimenez and Batbuyan, 2000). The Land Law also

¹⁶ See Fernandez-Gimenez and Batbuyan, 2000, Sneath, 2002a, Wingard, 2001.

gives sum governors the right to protect pasture and control livestock numbers (ibid)¹⁷. As Sneath (2002a) states, allocation of pastures has not been widely implemented to date. Reform of the Land Law is currently ongoing in the Mongolian Parliament at the time of writing. Recent press reports of the ongoing debate concerning this reform indicate that pastureland will become open to ownership by Mongolian citizens, although details of any such schemes are unclear at the time of writing (Ooluun, 2001).

Therefore, in summary, more recent international policy advice and initiatives appear to be moving away from the powerful global discourse of Tragedy of the Commons in favour of a more localised and participatory understanding of pasture use issues and potential solutions, including the strengthening of local institutions. A number of pilot projects are now underway in this field.

According to Agriteam, Canada (1997, p. IV-1), *'It is now globally accepted in the international development field that participatory approaches to development initiatives have a greater chance of success and sustainability.....it is recognised that in many development programmes and projects ...slavish adherence to a 'blueprint' plan is less effective than an approach which is incremental, experimental and flexible ...'*. This approach appears to be informing not only current considerations of land reform issues, but also the implementation of the biodiversity conservation discourse. This will be considered further in Section 5, in the general context of the biodiversity conservation discourse in Mongolia and more particularly in the case study area.

However, it is unclear at this stage to what extent recent developments in Mongolia truly represent a questioning of meta narrative and blueprints on the part of the development community and the extent to which this indicates a willingness on their part to accept uncertainty in outcomes with respect to development interventions.

5.0 BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN MONGOLIA

5.1. Global Discourse and the People-Environment Relations Debate

Biodiversity conservation has assumed an increasing importance in the global environment and development discourse in recent years, with a growing focus on its integration with goals of poverty alleviation and sustainable livelihoods. The degradation of grasslands on a global scale has been cited as having implications for major environmental concerns such as loss of genetic diversity *'at least as serious as those associated with the destruction of rainforests'* (Longworth and Williamson in Thwaites et al, 1998). Historically, the debate over biodiversity conservation in pastoral lands has tended to focus on flagship wildlife species and has often been expressed through creation of wildlife reserves and game reserves, for example in East Africa. In such areas the history of exclusion and disenfranchisement of local pastoralists by the creation of nature reserves has been well documented (McCabe et al, 1992). This reflects Fratkin's (1997) comments regarding the frequently negative impacts of all types of development interventions on pastoralists, as discussed in Section 4.

¹⁷ Hansted and Duncan (2001) argue that such flexibility in interpretation, although generally criticised by foreign consultants, is important for pastureland in that it facilitates incorporation of local nomadic customs into allocation of pasture rights, which is important for long-term sustainability.

However, growing policy consensus in favour of community participation in the management of natural resources has shaped development interventions in recent years. The preceding exclusionary conservation narrative was posited on the myth of pristine untouched nature and constructed local people as agents of environmental destruction, thereby necessitating the separation of people and nature in order to conserve and protect the latter. The failure of this narrative of fortress conservation has been variously ascribed to practical and financial problems implicit in policing exclusionary reserves and ethical issues arising from the dependence of many marginalised people on natural resources and biodiversity for their livelihoods, thus making the enforced separation of people and nature problematic to say the least. The exclusionary approach has also been undermined to some extent by recognition of the anthropogenic influence in shaping much of the biodiversity external agencies are seeking to conserve.

The resulting ideas of the role of communities in natural resource management and biodiversity conservation are given expression through ideas such as Integrated Conservation and Development Projects (ICDP) and Community Based Conservation (CBC), which apply to Protected Areas (PAs) and on a wider scale outside such areas, and more recently in ideas of co management. They are developed on the basis that goals of biodiversity conservation and poverty alleviation can be achieved in tandem, for example through exchange of access to resources on behalf of the local community for material consideration, or providing improved livelihoods directly linked to sustainable resource exploitation¹⁸. The idea of participation of local communities in management of PAs is central to such projects, with theoretically at least, a move away from previous ideas of local people as agents of environmental destruction.

However, it has been argued that such narratives of environmental destruction still underlie the creation of restrictive models of Protected Areas (PAs). Loss of pastureland to other uses is a frequent theme in pastoral literature for example to agriculture and in more recent years to Protected Areas in response to the discourse of biodiversity conservation. In Mongolia, protected areas have been cited as placing further constraints on pasture use by their encroachment onto traditional grazing areas (Agriteam Canada, 1997). These ideas are explored further with respect to the Mongolian context in Section 5.2.

The political nature of problem identification in the context of biodiversity conservation also needs to be considered¹⁹. In creating PAs, the 'problems' often appear to have already been externally defined, thus undermining at the outset the claims of any related ICDP or co management projects to be truly participatory.

5.2. Biodiversity Conservation in Mongolia- The New Framework

Conservation in Mongolia has a long history. While it is not within the scope of this analysis to consider the historical development of environmental laws prior to decollectivisation, it is interesting to note that specific written legal provisions related to

¹⁸ The change in approaches to biodiversity conservation and increasing emphasis on ICDP, CBC programmes are considered in a substantial body of literature for example Barrett and Arcese (1995), Brandon and Wells (1992), Brown (1998) and Wells et al (1993).

¹⁹ Batterbury et al (1997) discuss the sociology of environmental discourse and call for a more equitable identification of problems. Cleaver (2001) comments on characterisation of resources and users and problem identification as set out in policy documents and related to developmental discourse with respect to a case study site in Tanzania. She calls for greater scrutiny of such familiar analyses and representations.

the environment were in place as early as the 13th century. 18th century laws included restrictions on hunting and the establishment of protected zones around cities, and also protection of 16 mountains, where hunting and logging of young trees were prohibited (Wingard and Odgerel, 2001). Furthermore, Bogd Khan mountain was established as Mongolia's first Protected Area in 1778 and has been claimed to be the first such officially designated area in the world (ibid).

In the last decade Mongolia has become the focus for a number of international conservation and development initiatives and also became a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992. The global biodiversity discourse is clearly impacting natural resource management in Mongolia through changes in the legislative framework, expansion of the Protected Areas network and creation of Protected Area Administrations at the local level. At present approximately 15% of the country has Protected Area (PA) status, with a government goal of at least 30% (UNDP/ MNE, 1996). Therefore, an increasing impact on local people can be expected. The Government of Mongolia suggested in 1992 at the Rio 'Earth Summit' that the entire country be designated a Protected Area (ibid). By this comparison, the 30% appears relatively modest.

Through Article 8 of the Convention on Biological Diversity, Mongolia, as a signatory, has become committed to '*establish a system of protected areas or areas where special measures need to be taken to conserve biodiversity*'. A key document in the operationalisation of these commitments is the 1996 Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan (BCAP), (UNDP/ MNE, 1996), which has been implemented under the auspices of UNDP GEF and notably through the seven year '*Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Livelihood Options in the Grasslands of Eastern Mongolia*' or Eastern Steppe project. A number of major ICDP/ CBC type projects are also being implemented by organisations such Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) and German Technical Co-operation (GTZ).

The impact of the BCAP is illustrated in the rapid increase in the number of new Protected Areas designated each year in recent years. While a rate of one per year was typical in the 1960's and 1970's, ten were designated in 1996 alone and in the last nine years, as many as thirty eight new parks have been drawn on Mongolia's map (Wingard and Odgerel, 2001).

In the BCAP, Mongolian people are portrayed as having lived in harmony with nature and the environment. The document also states that the knowledge of local people should be respected and used and advocates public participation in conservation planning and actions. However, within this document herders are also portrayed as agents of environmental destruction. For example, estimates that one third of grazing land has been damaged are attributed to poor management. Overgrazing is identified as a major threat to biodiversity. The document states that '*traditional grazing land management was abandoned during the years of the cooperative campaign*', while the social and political causes of herders' actions are not mentioned in this analysis (UNDP/ MNE, 1996, p.26/27)

With respect to the legal framework of the country, the issuing of 23 acts relating to the environment by the *Ikh Khural*, the supreme legislative body, since 1990 (Wingard and Odgerel, 2001) is also illustrative of the increasing impact of biodiversity conservation discourse in the country. Recent work on the hierarchy of law in Mongolia highlights

discrepancies in the position of international treaties within the hierarchy. While the Constitution explicitly states that any international agreements which are in conflict with this said institution are invalid, many environmental laws contain a clause to the effect that where international treaties have been ratified they take precedence above domestic legislation (ibid).

The 1995 Law on Special Protected Areas established a new, fourfold classification system for Protected Areas in Mongolia.

Strictly Protected Areas [SPAs]
National Parks [NPs]
Nature Reserves [NRs]
National Monuments [NMs]

These categories are based on IUCN guidelines and Biosphere Reserve concepts. They encompass varying degrees of restriction on use. The greater degrees of restriction appear to apply to the former two categories, in which 'Traditional Livestock Husbandry' is forbidden in two of the three zones in the former case and one of the three in the latter (UNDP/MNE, 1996).²⁰

In the following section an example of the implementation of the biodiversity conservation discourse is considered with respect to the case study area. This case study highlights a number of the issues discussed above. For example the extent to which the project appears to be truly participatory and to reflect local priorities is considered. Institutional issues, as outlined in Sections 2 and 3 of this paper, are also considered in the context of CPR theory. Specifically the extent to which the project has sought to engage with and understand local institutions as opposed to using the more functionalist design principles or 'blueprint' for robust institutions is assessed. Challenges presented by case study material to current CPR management theories are summarised.

6.0. BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION, HERDERS AND THE GOBI GURVAN SAIKHAN NATIONAL PARK

6.1. The Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park

Gobi Gurvan Saikhan National Park (GGSNP) is one of 35 Protected Areas and the largest of the six National Parks in Mongolia, covering an area of approximately 2.7 million hectares, in Omnogovi aimag, southern Mongolia (Bedunah and Schmidt, 2000, Wingard, 2001). It is dominated by desert and semi desert conditions, with mountain steppe ecosystems at the highest elevations (Strasdas and Steinhauer-Burkart, 1997).

It became a PA in 1993, following assessment by WWF and Mongolian scientists. The area was designated for protection due to its flora and fauna, including endemic desert plants of the Gobi-Altai range and eight Red Book species of fauna such as Argali sheep (*Ovis ammon*) and snow leopard (*Uncia uncia*), in addition to its varied landscapes and important palaeontological sites (ibid)²¹. The main threats to the park cited by WWF in

²⁰ Designations and permitted activities are set out in full in the Biodiversity Conservation Action Plan (1996) and also discussed in Wingard and Odgerel (2001). The latter document indicates grey areas in the law with respect to permitted activities in the various zones of Strictly Protected Areas and National Parks.

²¹ Further details of flora and fauna of the park are provided in Bedunah and Schmidt (2000).

support of its designation included desertification, related to climatic issues and increasing livestock numbers, poaching, collection of medicinal herbs, destruction of saxual trees, excavation of dinosaur fossils and unregulated tourism (ibid).

Records for the whole park area indicate a population of approximately 1,100 herding households, with in excess of 218,000 head of livestock, typically including sheep, goats and horses, with camels common particularly in the western part of the park and cows in the east (Bedunah and Schmidt, 2000). Available records also indicate an overall increase in numbers of livestock and herding families since 1993 (ibid). Cashmere goats are important in the area, with cashmere historically forming the region's most important export product. Herding is the main livelihood strategy in the area at present.

Current zonation of the park, according to Ministry of Nature and Environment (MNE) criteria for National Parks, permits livestock grazing in the Limited Use Zone, but prohibits it in Special Zones, while the situation in the and Travel and Tourism Zone is ambiguous (ibid). A buffer zone has been established around the park in accordance with the requirements of the 1997 Mongolian Law on Buffer Zones²².

6.2. The 'Nature Conservation and Bufferzone Development' Project: Discourse or Participation?

Project Outline

A project focusing on community participation in Protected Area management is being implemented by the Mongolian Ministry of Nature and the Environment (MNE) and, German Technical Co-operation (GTZ) in GGSNP, as part of the 'Nature Conservation and Bufferzone Development' project. Locally, the South Gobi Protected Area Administration (PAA) are working with the support of GTZ to develop joint management of the park (Schmidt, undated, a). This GTZ project focuses on three Protected Areas and their buffer zones: Gobi Gurvan Saikhan, Gorkhi Terelj and Khan Khentii. The second phase of the project, which focuses on participatory planning with local herders, was initiated in 1998 in the Gobi area (Schmidt, undated, b). Overall, GTZ's stated goals include the general goal '*to contribute to the sustainable conservation/ protection of Mongolia's ecosystems*', with a specific project purpose that '*local people and other stakeholders utilise the protected areas and their corresponding buffer zones according to conservation objectives*' (GTZ Project Planning Matrix).

The 'Problems'

Key problematic issues identified in the park by GTZ prior to the implementation of the project are summarised as follows (Kar et al, 2001):

- Conflicts related to sharing natural resources, especially pasture, between wild animals and livestock and related negative attitudes of herders towards any attempts to reduce pressure on pastureland for wildlife through control of livestock numbers
- Corresponding negative attitudes of the National Park administration towards herders, particularly their view of herders as part of the problem in running the park
- Scarcity of functioning water wells

²² This law requires buffer zones to be established around Strictly Protected Areas and National Parks, with the stated aims of minimising, preventing and eliminating adverse impacts on the areas themselves, while also increasing public participation, securing livelihoods and determining requirements for the proper use of natural resources. See Wingard and Odgerel (2001).

- Lack of alternative livelihood options for herders, thus forcing them to increase livestock numbers to increase their income and also to increase the proportion of goats within their herds as cashmere was the only good source of income. Associated negative effects on the pasture
- Lack of appreciation of the link between environmental problems and herder poverty on the part of the local administration
- Overall lack of interaction between park administration and other actors in the area with respect to conservation issues.

The GTZ Approach

Project documents cite the participatory approach as being particularly suitable in the Mongolian context and with respect to GGSNP for the following key reasons (Schmidt, undated, a):

- i) the vast scale of the park, the lack of resources, such as park rangers, to monitor and enforce rules.
- ii) Positive experiences of such participatory projects elsewhere in the world and importance of local people's knowledge and stake in preserving the land.

i.e. what may be termed the negative aspects of the top down approach and the positive benefits of the more participatory approach. Ecological factors are also cited in support of a more devolved, participatory approach. The non equilibrium nature of the environment is described as requiring spatial and temporal flexibility for seasonal use, which is best planned at a local level (Schmidt, 2000).

Project documents show a strong commitment to the participatory approach. In particular they state that '*The role of project interventions is to support peoples' own initiatives*'. (Schmidt, undated, a). This philosophy is subsequently stated more explicitly: '*.. the project's focus is shifting to people-centred and process-oriented interventions. In order to empower and enable people to sustainably use the resources they depend on, to prevent degradation of the land and to halt the threat of encroaching desertification, the project's role is that of a catalyst and facilitator. Whilst the up coming initiatives may still be random, they are indicators for growing self help and empowerment of the local people. In supporting the local initiatives, the project aims to develop local institutions that **ultimately** will become instrumental in park management and nature conservation*' (ibid). (Emphasis not in original).

A report from a project workshop held in April/ May 1999 states one of the objectives of the workshop as initiating a participatory process, thus leading to empowerment of the local people/ institutions and the institutionalisation of participation (Kar, 1999). This is set in contrast to previous government attitudes and the focus of environmental laws and nationally designed programmes, which are described as '*heavily inclined to technology, materials, things etc and were far less people centred*' (ibid, p. 5). Two workshops focusing on training park, project and local government officials in Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) for natural resource management were organised by the project in response to this priority.

One of the project recommendations, which arose from the April/ May 1999 workshop, was that formation of local herders groups should be encouraged (Kar, 1999). Kar's 1999 report further states that one single formula for the formation and functioning of such groups may not be appropriate, but that there may be different location specific

mechanisms, thus requiring great flexibility and openness in the project's approach to this issue. It also states that the differing processes should be documented for in house learning. However, as stated by project staff (pers comm., 2001) they have not specifically worked on understanding local institutional forms and processes as a focus for their intervention i.e. as recommended by Agrawal and Gibson (1999).

The importance of developing links with other institutions and organisations such as the PAA, local government and other projects such as a UNDP Water and Sanitation Project is also stressed in project documents.

The project's strategies also include exchange of experiences between groups in different areas of the park and what may be termed a self sponsored replication of such groups.

Summary

In summary, the PAA of GGSNP, in conjunction with GTZ, initiated participatory approaches to conservation and development in the park through use of PRA in 1999. Activities comprised a number of workshops for National Park and project staff, local government officials, herders' representatives, and representatives of other related projects in the area (Kar et al, 2001). By the end of 2000, a total of 21 herders community groups had formed within the park in response to these initiatives (ibid). The project documents are indicative of a highly participatory, flexible approach and are of particular interest in the context of this research as they indicate an avoidance of the pitfalls implicit in reliance on an idealised notion of community, but rather a concern with creating space and support for local intuitions and initiatives to arise or be strengthened.

Therefore, through examination of the implementation of the project on the ground and the herders' views and experiences in this respect, the project offers a number of opportunities with regard to the focus of this paper. It is possible to examine Agrawal and Gibson's (1999) views regarding the importance of a more 'ethnographic' institutional focus in development interventions, as discussed in Section 2, by comparison with reference to more idealised blueprints for creation of robust institutions for CPR management. It is also possible to contribute to the related debate concerning conditions under which collective action occurs. Finally, it offers the opportunity to examine the implementation of notions of biodiversity conservation at the local level and the extent to which goals and perceptions are shared between stakeholders. Such evaluation of case study material from a particular *bag* within the park and buffer zone area is undertaken in Section 6.4, while the following section sets out results of fieldwork in this case study area.

6.3. Participation, Conservation and the Herders of Khavsgait Bag

I undertook fieldwork in Khavsgait *bag* in the period October to December 2000 and again in June/ July 2001.

Khavsgait *bag* lies completely within the area of the GGSNP and its bufferzone. Its population is mainly employed in livestock herding, with a proportion herding livestock, primarily cashmere goats, for the Animal Husbandry Institute (AHI)²³.

²³ The AHI is a state research institute, based in Bulgan *sum* centre, which focuses on breeding cashmere goats. Khavsgait *bag* is one of the administrative territories of Bulgan *sum*.

The research focused on a range of issues around pasture use, local institutions, historical adaptations and changes in land use, changes in formal and informal institutions and perceptions of environmental issues, including the role of the PAA and the project. A questionnaire survey was carried out during the winter 2000 fieldwork period, in conjunction with collection of oral histories and interviews with local government, project and PAA officials. The second phase of fieldwork in summer 2001 focused on capturing seasonal differences pasture use and institutions on the part of the herders through follow up interviews with all households or *khot ail* groups²⁴ where present, key informant interviews and participant observation. Further interviews were also consulted with local administration, PAA and project staff. Only material particularly pertaining to herders' views and experiences of the PA and the project and institutional issues is presented in the following sections.

Winter 2000 – Institutional Framework and Views of the Protected Area

I administered a total of 111 questionnaires to herding households/ groups i.e. over 90% of such groups in the *bag* territory in the winter 2000 research period.

Institutions

When asked to identify institutions important in their daily lives 31% of the herding groups identified the AHI, while 30% stated that there were no such institutions. A total of 33% identified the *bag* or *sum* governors, although many respondents stated that they did so in the absence of any close institutions and that in reality the local administration had little impact on their daily lives. Many stated that they would like to have closer links with the *bag* governor in particular in the future and that he should have greater contact with the herders. A total of 5% identified neighbouring households or their *khot ail* or relatives as the most important institution, while only 1 respondent, a ranger, mentioned the PAA or associated institutions in this category. Respondents therefore primarily related this question to formal institutions or organisations. Information concerning informal rules and norms was also gathered during the two phases of fieldwork, but is not presented in detail here. This will form the focus for a future paper.

Therefore, on the basis of the winter 2000 data, the situation in Khavsgait appears to reflect that presented in the wider academic literature i.e. an absence of effective formal institutions with respect to pasture management. One interesting development in the Khavsgait area is the appearance of '*aarvd*'²⁵ in recent years. There was much confusion among the herders as to the origin and purpose of these institutions, with the majority agreeing they were started by the *bag* governor, with the purpose of organising and attending cultural activities and also joining labour for herding tasks. Over 60% of those who claimed to belong to *aarvd* stated that the *aarvd* had done nothing to date. Subsequent interviews with the *bag* governor confirmed that he had started the *aarvd*, although with the purpose of developing leadership skills in young people. The relationship and interaction between *aarvd* and community institutions, following

²⁴ In most cases the basic herding unit in winter 2000 was a single household or occupants of a single tent (*ger*). However, in a number of instances two or more *gers*/ households were acting as a single herding unit, and most such units identified **themselves** as a *khot ail*. This is in contrast to portions of the literature which claim that *khot ails* do not exist in the Gobi region. Only 1 questionnaire was administered to such units.

²⁵ These comprise groups of 10 households, subdivided on the basis of geographical proximity at their winter camps.

participatory activity on the part of the project between the two fieldwork periods, is considered in the following section.

Opinions and Knowledge of GGSNP Protected Area and the Role of the Project

In winter 2000, 73% of the herders of Khavsgait *bag* claimed they had no knowledge of the aims, boundaries or history of the PA. While 70% identified some forms of actual or potential benefits to them in protecting places for nature conservation, concerns were expressed as to why foreign projects were interested in their particular area, and whether such interventions would lead to loss of Mongolian control over the land in the future. One herder stated that Mongolians had always protected nature *'from the old times, in the traditional way. It doesn't need to be protected by big projects and many people. Foreign projects would do better to look after the life conditions of the herders'*.

One respondent also expressed concern that the initial participatory meeting conducted in the area by the project had raised people's expectations about future benefits, but in his view no tangible benefits had been delivered. When questioned about the aims of the PA and the GTZ project another herder said *'I have heard that one extra purpose is to improve the living conditions of the poor families, but I don't see that the condition is improving'*. At the time of the winter 2000 questionnaires 49% of the herders did not feel that they had been consulted or involved in any way in management of the PA²⁶. One herder stated that *'Last year they held a meeting and discussed something like "herders are not allowed to live here because of protecting the area"'. Another stated that 'Maybe we have been consulted! They have come around here and told us that "this is the PA and we are doing conservation here", so maybe we have been consulted!'*

Summary

Therefore, the results of the winter 2000 fieldwork indicated that many herders were unaware of the aims of the project and the PA, with some expressing fear that this may lead to exclusion of herders from particular areas in the future, although this had not happened to date. Many herders also claimed during discussions that they had not seen any tangible benefit from the particular GGSNP PA and related projects in their daily lives, although the majority did recognise the possibility of benefits in the future in terms of protecting the pasture and environment for their children. Generally, the herders appeared to support the notion of protecting areas for nature conservation, but to be concerned with possible future negative impacts such as loss of grazing, rather than seeing any immediate direct benefit to them. A number were also concerned that such activities should be undertaken by Mongolian people and not by outsiders. It was also interesting to note that the majority of herders thought that there were no rules related to using the PA which affected them. Should new rules be developed in the future or existing rules rigorously enforced then it may be expected that the overall positive perception of the PA may change. The majority of herders also noted a lack of formal institutions relevant to their everyday lives. A number stated that since the end of the collectives people had become very individualistic and even selfish.

²⁶ In interpreting statistics it should be noted that Khavsgait *bag* was extended to include the neighbouring Ulziit *bag* as a result of administrative changes in summer 2000. Prior to this the projects activities had focused primarily on Khavsgait, but not on Ulziit *bag*. However, 35% of the old, pre 2000 Khavsgait *bag* claimed that they had not been involved or consulted in any way in management of the PA.

Summer, 2001. New Communities and Institutional Change.

Developments in the Winter 2000 to Summer 2001 Period

Considerable changes in local attitudes to the park and the project and in the institutional framework were apparent in Khavsgait by the time of the second period of fieldwork.

Interviews with project staff and with the herders revealed that three ‘communities’²⁷ had formed in the interval between the two fieldwork periods. The process of community formation is described by GTZ as coming from the herders themselves, for example the communities typically ask GTZ for advice while they are in the process of formation and GTZ provide support and guidance and attempt to facilitate the growth of the communities (Schmidt, 2001, pers comm). It was further stated as a general principle that after the 1st PRA meeting in an area, GTZ don’t pressure people, but instead they leave them alone to see what they can do and if they need support or help. Sometimes things happen straightaway and sometimes nothing happens for a long time. It is not always clear why (ibid).

In the case of the Khavsgait communities, it appears that an initial PRA was carried out in the area in 1999, but with relatively little subsequent project activity until winter/spring 2000/ 2001, when a new GTZ extension officer was elected for the Khavsgait area. Following active dissemination of information about the notion of the communities, six further PRAs were carried out with project and PAA staff, at the express invitation of the groups of herders interested in forming the communities. The aims of the communities were decided at the PRAs i.e. by the herders themselves (GTZ extension officer, pers comm, 2001). However, the GTZ extension officer summarised the main aims of the communities as working together and doing conservation by themselves i.e. without requiring PAA leadership. The communities were considered to have officially formed when they held a meeting to elect their leader and committee and discussed their action plan (ibid).

In view of the very recent formation of these communities it is not possible to examine their success or failure in the long term and deduce possible reasons underlying this. However, in the overall context of this paper it is useful to examine herders’ reasons for adopting this more formalised approach to collective action at this time, their aims and priorities and the nature of this institutional form relative to other, local institutions.

Incentives for Collective Action

In key informant interviews and follow up informal interviews I conducted with all herding households, a number of reasons were given by herders for joining a community or planning to join one:

²⁷ The term ‘community’ is used here to denote the groups formed by herders in the Khavsgait area, as this is the term used in GTZ literature. However, this term does not appear to be synonymous with the idealised aggregate notion of community prevalent in much community based conservation type literature and widely criticised in recent years e.g. by Agrawal and Gibson, 1999, amongst others. Indeed GTZ staff have stated that this is just a convenient name for the groups. In Khavsgait, the term refers to a group of herders who have come together voluntarily, usually with the purpose of working together in an organised way, and who have elected leaders and a committee for this purpose. They typically appear to comprise between 10 and 20 households.

'Being a community is very beneficial, as they will have community funding, will work to increase the funding and will do business. It also opens the way for alternative livelihoods, as well as livestock husbandry'. Herder [Place 59] Khavsgait bag.

'Before the community there was no discussion between households. Now if 1 household of the community has an idea they all discuss it and if possible they will do it'. Herder [Place 54] Khavsgait bag.

'I feel that the community is very beneficial as we are all joining our power and strength. Therefore, we can do now in 1 day what used to take many days.....[The community] is making people more enthusiastic, thoughtful and active'. Herder [Place 76] Khavsgait bag.

When asked why they thought the communities had suddenly formed now many herders cited the example of community formation in an adjacent sum, Bayandalai²⁸. Since that time *aarvd* leaders and other local herders from Khavsgait had gone to Bayandalai, as organised by the project, to learn from Bayandalai communities and observe problems and benefits associated with those communities. This opportunity for direct learning from other herders seems to have been very important in encouraging herders to form communities in Khavsgait:

'From what I saw in Bayandalai I thought the communities were beneficial.....I told the others (here) my views and ideas about what I had seen in Bayandalai. I said I thought it would be useful and people said that it seemed like a good idea' Herder [Place 9/10] Khavsgait bag.

Others stated more generally that communities were forming now due to ideas disseminated by the project staff.

A number of herders had considered the role of the community in relation to the wider socio economic circumstances:

'It's the first time since the end of the collective that people have tried to work like this. It's a very important thing to join their labours together. Maybe this [community formation] is happening now because of the modern economic situation. People's motives have probably changed and it fits the current situation to join their power together to improve their livelihoods'. Herder [Place 5] Khavsgait bag.

'Being a community is powerful, for example for marketing to cashmere companies, otherwise individual herders aren't respected. Being a community member is more powerful than being independent. People have been thinking about this for many years and they have decided to join now because now individual people are not considered so much and big companies and enterprises like to have connections with a community or a centralised place'. Herder [Place 136], Khavsgait bag.

Aims of the Communities

The majority of herders' stated that the communities were formed to help herders work together, especially with respect to heavier jobs such as shearing livestock and fixing

²⁸ Bayandalai was the site of formation of the first project related communities.

shelters. A number also stated that the communities aimed to help herders with marketing of livestock products and development of alternative livelihoods. It is interesting, in view of the project's stated objectives, that conservation was rarely mentioned by the herders with respect to the aims of the communities and was certainly not a priority.

Prospects for 'Success'

When asked why they believed the communities could work, as opposed to the general perception that the *aarvd* had failed, key differences between the two institutions were pointed out as follows:

'There is a big difference between the aarvd and the community. 'Community' means friendship....but the aarvd is just 10 households' Herder [Place 71/ 72] Khavsgait bag.

Also, the communities formed voluntarily as opposed to being arbitrarily subdivided on geographical grounds by the *bag* governor and according to one herder, *'the aarvd households weren't told what they should do, but the community organised themselves.'* Herder [Place 105], Khavsgait bag. It was also seen as important that the communities chose their own leaders whereas; *'the aarvd were just divided geographically and leaders were chosen by others.'* Herder [Place 76] Khavsgait bag.

More generally people cited their long period of residence in proximity to and interaction with each other as important factors in the likelihood of success of the communities.

'Communities' and Pre Existing Institutions

In examining the nature of the community with respect to pre existing institutional arrangements, two issues stood out from herder interviews: the role of the community in institutionalising informal norms of assistance (whether or not the particular herder thought that such formalisation was beneficial) and echoes of historical institutional arrangements in the community.

Some herders felt that the communities were unnecessary, because they simply duplicated activities that were already happening as customary, informal institutions:

'Its not necessary to have a community. For example if Jalkhuu wanted to catch all his mares to milk them he would ask others for help and they will help him. It's an unwritten law'. Herder [Place 12] Khavsgait bag.

They cited potential difficulties with attempting to formally organise large groups of families, particularly in view of the likely distances between community members at certain times of the year. However, others viewed this formalisation of existing customary norms as potentially beneficial.

A number of herders compared the community to a particular formal collective institution, the *khesig*²⁹;

²⁹ *Khesig* are defined as a group of several *suurs*, who formed a subdivision of the brigade in collective times. (Sneath, 2002b). The brigades were themselves subdivisions of the collective, with typically 2-5 brigades per collective (Mearns, 1996).

‘There were khesig in the brigades. Communities are similar to khesig. The khesig was just households who worked together to carry out tasks allotted by the collective, for example making hay, fixing shelters and shearing livestock together’. Herder [Place 5] Khavsgait bag.

This was confirmed by another herder:

‘There were khesig in the collective times. They were for collective action and were similar to the community’. Herder [Place 142] Khavsgait bag.

6.4. Biodiversity Conservation in GGSNP: GTZ Project, Herders and CPR Theory

Rapid attitudinal and institutional changes appear to have occurred in Khavsgait bag as a result of PRA based project interventions. A new formal institution, the ‘community’ has appeared in the area, which at least in the view of a proportion of the herders, is essentially a formalisation of existing customary norms.

As stated by project staff they have not specifically worked on understanding local institutional forms and processes as a focus for their intervention and as recommended by Agrawal and Gibson (1999). However, the project intervention appears to have created space for local herders to develop their own preferred version of the institutional arrangements, through formalisation of existing informal institutions and though using the previous collective model of the *khesig*, which I argue was important in being recognisable to people and providing them with a familiar model. The importance of learning from peers has also been demonstrated by the project with the project appearing to facilitate information exchange between herder groups and stepping back from the control of information flow.

Therefore, a formalised mode of collective action appears to have been facilitated over a very short timescale. This is in spite of the absence of many of Ostrom’s ‘design principles’ for successful local institutions for CPR management, as outlined in Section 2, and discussed in the Mongolian context in Section 3.2. It is also in spite of the reported absence, by the herders themselves, of any such formal mid level institutions (i.e. between individual households or *khot ail* and the local administration) since the demise of the collective and *horshoo* in the area.

Therefore, it is important to question why this formation of formal institutions has occurred at this point in the post-decollectivisation history of the Khavsgait area. The intervention of the project is an obvious answer. However, the receptivity, apparent enthusiasm and activity of herders in response to this intervention requires greater explanation, particularly in view of the failure of *horshoo* and the inactivity of *aarvd* prior to the project intervention. This paper argues that wider historical change is at least as important as the ‘design principles’ in initiating the process of collective action. In the decade since the end of the collectives herders have experienced the vagaries and difficulties of the market economy in a way they had not had chance to do at the time the *horshoo* were set up and failed. I also argue that this has created an incentive towards co-operation, particularly in view of the severe impacts of *dzuds* in recent years. Another factor may be the growing requirement of development projects e.g. for well reinstatement to deal with *khot ail* or other groups of herders as opposed to individual households.

The commitment of GTZ to flexibility and facilitation and their apparent willingness to accept herders as opposed to their own priorities also appears to have been central to this project so far, particularly in view of the low priority apparently accorded to conservation objectives by the majority of Khavsgait herders at present. Thus it appears that in this instance at least the biodiversity conservation discourse is being forced to fit local realities and in doing so is facilitating collective action to achieve local goals.

However, it remains to be seen if these new institutions will have any institutional depth and how interactions will play out between community and non community members, particularly if the former gain control of key resources such as wells in the future through such development initiatives. The potential for such projects to increase and reinforce inequality among herders cannot be discounted. The apparent mismatch between herders and the projects priorities may also be a source of difficulty in the future.

7.0 CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to explore relationships between particular developmental discourses and local realities on the Mongolian pastoral commons.

The prevalence of discourse over local realities and variability in Mongolia, particularly in the early post-decollectivisation years is apparent in certain areas of international advice from this time. This can be seen to be linked to historical representations of pastoralists in development literature and in particular their relationship to the environment. Notions of irrational practices on the part of pastoralists and associated adverse environmental impacts have typically informed such literature and development practice in the past. These debates have taken place around the discourse of the Tragedy of the Commons and have frequently been used in support of calls for land reform, particularly land privatisation. However, examination of recent policy literature and advice in the Mongolian context has indicated a movement away from such discourses towards a more participatory, locally flexible approach to land reform issues. It remains to be seen how such ideas will be implemented in reality.

The discourse of biodiversity conservation has also been of great importance in Mongolia in the post-decollectivisation years, and will continue to be so in the future in view of the Government's commitment to extending the Protected Area network. Examination of the roots of this discourse indicates many similar assumptions to that of the Tragedy of the Commons, specifically in notions of irrational local land use practices and constructions of local people as agents of environmental degradation. Despite recent shifts towards a participatory approach to biodiversity conservation at the global level, the extent to which such projects truly devolve power to local people have been called into question. With respect to CPRs, developments in theory concerning the nature of local institutions for the management of such resources has important implications for development practice in biodiversity conservation and other types of interventions, with particular reference to participation. A more socially embedded, 'ethnographic' concept of such institutions calls into question the notion of blueprints for creation of robust, 'successful' CPR institutions, as typically required by development agencies. Instead, through focusing on institutions as embodiments of social process, devolution of power, willingness to accept uncertainty in outcomes and true participation appear to follow. It also follows, as indicated by results of a case study in Mongolia, that factors other than Ostrom's design principles may be locally important in facilitating collective action.

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