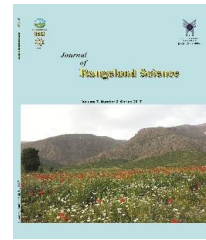


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Journal homepage: www.rangeland.ir



Review and Full Length Article:

Will Mongolia's Herders Disappear within 10 Years?

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Received on: 05/10/2016

Accepted on: 28/10/2016

Introduction

The challenges related to the preservation of Mongolia's pastureland, its quality and condition are key concerns for the livestock sector. However, scientists, researchers and government agencies tend to focus solely on rangeland ecology and livestock. All too often, herders are overlooked and omitted from the discourse. This is the main reason I want to talk about people of the Mongolian grassland and Social justice issues in rangelands.

Mongolia's herders are the keepers of culture and tradition, passing on their knowledge and wisdom from generation to generation. However, the number of herders has been decreasing each year while the number of livestock has been rapidly growing. By the end of 2015, there were 50 million livestock nationally and just 145,200 herder households. In 2010, herder households numbered 223,000. Sixty percent of herder households have fewer than 200 head of livestock, with only 3 percent of wealthier herders owning more than 1000. According to economists, 200 livestock per household is below the living standard and is insufficient to sustain people's lives. This means that 60 percent of herders, or 87,000 people, are vulnerable to losing their livestock- their

key source of income and household security- in natural disasters.

Reasons for the drop in herder numbers

1. **The age of herders:** Statistically, the average age of herders is 45 years old. Young herders between the ages of 20-35 represent just 20 percent of all herders. Hence, the majority of herders are ageing, and there is no government policy or support for the younger generation of herders.

2. **Inadequate social welfare services:** Most herders do not pay social and health insurance on a voluntary basis; therefore, they are unable to access social and health services. Herding is strenuous work, with unlimited work hours and no occupational safety provisions. Herders must work outdoors irrespective of the climatic conditions, and are at risk of disease, with many losing their ability to work or dying at an early age. They are also susceptible to such animal-to-human diseases as brucellosis and parasites (*Echinococcus*, *Cysticercus tenuicollis*). Diet is an important component of herders' health. Herders' diets are

predominantly meat-based, with a general lack of vegetables and other vitamin-enriched food. This had led to high rates of stomach and liver cancer. There is also a lack of other government services in remote areas. The lack of information and means of communication is one of leading causes of rural to urban migration. Overall, the quality of life for herders is poor compared with urban life. In trying to survive in a harsh climate, herders have little time to focus on their living conditions, health, diet and wellbeing.

3. **Six-year-old school children:**

The Mongolian education sector several years ago adopted a 12-year school system. This means children are required to begin school when they are six years of age, which has presented problems for herder households. Young herders with six-year-old children need to have a separate home in the soum centre where mothers can stay to look after their children. Husbands remain in the countryside to tend to their livestock. This increases households' living expenses and can negatively impact on couples' relationships, prompting some couples to divorce.

4. **Repeated natural disasters:**

Multi-disciplinary studies have shown that the degradation and deterioration of pasturelands has significantly worsened with the growth in herd numbers, as well as from human activities and negative changes in climate and the environment. Reduced rainfall and climatic changes have led to declines in grass growth and feed quality, resulting in poor herd productivity. Herders have also lost significant numbers of

livestock in dzuds and droughts. Those who have lost their animals tend to migrate to urban areas in search of other jobs.

Conclusions & Implications

According to statistics for the past five years, the number of herders has fallen by about 15,400 each year. If this trend continues, in 10 years there will be no more herders. In order to address this situation, the following actions need to be taken:

- Conduct a nationwide survey among herders to ensure there is an accurate database on the herding community, and produce reports or articles to raise awareness of the issue among scientists, policymakers and government agencies.
- Support young herders through education on traditional herding practices, encourage their social participation, and ensure sustainable income sources (such as incentives or bonuses for young herders, income diversification, and compensation for remote herder households).
- Conduct activities nationwide to address the problems herders face in relation to social welfare services (such as improved education, culture, and health services for herders).
- Identify alternative ways to educate six-year-old children from herder households (such as mobile education services, home-based distance education, learning via television or radio, and summer training).
- Conduct a public awareness campaign promoting a positive image of herders and the pride of being a herder.

References

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