



**DRR IN
ACTION
CASE
STUDY**

Winter shelters for rural herder communities

Theme of the Case Study

Community/local action for resilience

Country

Mongolia

Case location

21 provinces across the country

Background

Mongolian Red Cross Society (MRCS) has been implementing a community-based disaster risk reduction project since 2014, with support from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the Australian Red Cross. This project was based on a nationwide Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA), one of the first nationwide VCAs in Asia.

The harsh winter climate in Mongolia, where temperatures can reach as low as -40 degrees Celsius in winter, has potentially massive effects for rural herder communities who rely on the survival of their livestock for their income. In the winter of 2009-2010, Mongolia lost 20 per cent of its livestock due to extreme temperatures and exposure. Mongolia is affected by a unique climactic phenomenon called Dzud, where a severe drought is followed by an extreme winter. The loss of livestock has significant effects on the socio-economic security of rural herder communities. It can have adverse impacts on the psycho-social health of herder communities, and challenges the maintenance of a traditional, nomadic lifestyle.

What did the action seek to change?

The project aims to reduce the impact of disasters on vulnerable communities in Mongolia through sustainable risk reduction and resilience building interventions. Its purpose is to strengthen the collective capacity of MRCS, government authorities and communities, in localized disaster preparation and response across each province in Mongolia.

What were the key actions taken to achieve this change?

The project supported herder community groups to construct winter shelters for their livestock, in order to provide protection from the harsh temperatures. With reinforced winter shelters, the herder communities were able to decrease livestock loss

Photo: Elderly herder family who benefited from winter shelter activity, Darkhan-Uul province. March 2018. | MRCS

significantly and reduce vulnerability. A participatory, community-based approach contributed greatly in the successful construction and maintenance of winter shelters. Building on learnings around the survival of younger livestock, herders began constructing sub-shelters for smaller and younger livestock.

What were the essential steps taken along the process to bring about this change?

During monitoring, a herder community leader was asked how the winter shelters would affect his situation:

“We will be able to provide storage for offspring. It will be bigger, and we can have more offspring. Now we can only have 30 – 40. We hope for more livestock in two years’ time. We hope to double our livestock. All families now lose about 50 per cent of their livestock. So, it will help to maintain the current level of income.”

Step 1	The first step was the participatory, nationwide Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment (VCA). The process was conducted in 18 khoroos of nine districts, and 44 soums across 21 provinces of Mongolia between October 2012 and March 2013, to determine disaster risks in rural areas and the local capacity to reduce them with the involvement of the community.
Step 2	The VCA revealed that a key disaster risk facing communities throughout Mongolia, with particular threats to the resilience of rural, nomadic herder communities, was Dzud and extreme winter. Winter shelters were then discussed as a potential option for the project.
Step 3	Participatory scoping and development of contextually relevant winter shelters were conducted with herder groups.
Step 4	Herder beneficiary groups for winter shelter were selected from all 21 provinces. Based on community participatory meeting, herder community members selected who should benefit from winter shelter assistance based on their vulnerability.
Step 5	Based on community recommendation, mid-level branches together with herder beneficiary groups developed their winter shelter design, and procurement of the shelter material commenced. Herder group members themselves were involved in the process including building of the shelters, therefore raising empowerment to the herders.

What SFDRR principles¹ were applicable to this change process?

- Principle 1 Empowerment of local authorities and communities through resources, incentives and decision making responsibilities as appropriate.
- Principle 2 Accounting of local and specific characteristics of disaster risks when determining measures to reduce risk.
- Principle 3 Addressing underlying risk factors cost-effectiveness through investment versus relying primarily on post disaster response and recovery.

What were the Achievements and the Impacts?

Herder community groups constructed winter shelters for protection of livestock from the harsh temperatures. With reinforced winter shelters, the herder communities were able to decrease livestock loss significantly, protect their livelihoods and reduce vulnerability.

A participatory, community-based approach contributed greatly in the successful design, construction and maintenance of winter shelters, as well as local ownership and sustainability of efforts.



Elderly herder family who benefited from winter shelter activity, Darkhan-Uul province. March 2018. | MRCS

¹ e.g. Primary responsibility of the State, Shared responsibility, Protection, All-of-society-engagement, coordination mechanism, empowering local-decision makers, Multi-hazard approach and inclusive risk-informed decision-making, Sustainable development, Local and specific risks.

As main drivers of the activities, the herders were best-placed to use learnings around the survival of younger livestock. They constructed sub-shelters for off-springs and younger livestock, contributing to increasing their livestock to overcome earlier losses.

Although it is not yet evidenced due to the project being in its early stages, it is anticipated that the winter shelters will have significant effect on the long term ability of herder families to continue their lifestyles and remain economically secure. This will also have effects on the livelihoods of their children.

The project brought together relevant partners and stakeholders, to strengthen the collective capacity of MRCs, government authorities and communities in localized disaster preparation and response across each province in Mongolia.

Comments from governor of local soum:

“When they (herder communities) lose their livestock, they lose their livelihood and I can’t supply them with a job. The winter shelter is like a working place for the herders. The more families who build shelters, the more it will help the soum economy. In the past many herders have left the area to move to the city. These people who move to the city don’t have an education and they add to the unemployment in the city and they can’t afford to come back to this area. In the future, herders won’t have a need to move to the city.

Not all herder communities can afford a shelter. But this shelter will encourage others to have a winter shelter. Local government can at least provide the labour to help build the shelters.”

What were the key Lessons Learnt?

Mongolia was experiencing a severe Dzud; 120 Soums were considered to be in “white dzud” phase, meaning that high snowfall is preventing livestock from reaching the grass to graze. When monitoring was conducted, the herder groups and collectives that had received support to build shelters, reported that they had lost little to no livestock. This underlines the effectiveness of the shelters in preventing livestock loss. Herder families have reported that they are able to pay for basic education, food and transport costs due to the fact that their livestock survived the harsh Dzud.

Programmatically, the winter shelter approach is regarded as successful by a number of actors, including the National Emergency Management Agency and Red Cross Red Crescent Movement members, who have replicated the approach in programmes they support.

What were the Good Practices arising from this action?

Good Practice 1	Participation of herder groups throughout leads to local ownership of the project. Herder groups were responsible for the management and upkeep of the winter shelters, increasing local ownership.
Good Practice 2	Utilizing local suppliers means that designs are contextually relevant, and further strengthened local markets.
Good Practice 3	Building contextually relevant designs improves the sustainability and local ownership of the winter shelters.
Good Practice 4	Working in partnership with local emergency actors from inception, implementation and evaluation means that community action can be integrated with existing systems.
Good Practice 5	Investment in community/local action for disaster preparedness can lead to stronger livelihoods outcomes for local communities.

Policy Relevance to DRR in Action

The project contributes to the Sendai Framework priority 3: investing in DRR for resilience; and the Asia Regional Plan – for local risk assessments and strengthen capacity of local communities. The initiative also supports strong development outcomes in health and education, which leads to increased community resilience. By supporting herder communities to maintain their livestock and livelihoods, they will have more resources to dedicate to health and education outcomes

The project and interventions are aligned with SDG Goal 1. “End poverty in all its forms everywhere”, specifically with 1.5: “By 2030, build the resilience of the poor and those in vulnerable situations and reduce their exposure and vulnerability to climate-related extreme events and other economic, social and environmental shocks and disasters”. The project is supporting herder communities to be more resilient to the climatic phenomenon of extreme winter and Dzud, through protecting their livelihoods and livestock.

Key Messages from this Case Study

- Risk resilient development approaches are more effective when local communities are involved in developing solutions.
- Specific needs of at-risk groups need to be analysed as part of an effective DRR initiative.
- A participatory, community-based approach contributed greatly in a successful construction and maintenance of locally relevant winter shelters.
- The Red Cross is well placed to drive community and local action for resilience through the network of Red Cross branches and volunteers working on the ground with communities and local authorities, connecting national level linkages with the government and other development actors through MRCS and Movement Partners.

The case study is an excellent example of a locally-led, sustainable and contextually relevant intervention developed and supported by the Mongolian Red Cross, the Red Cross National Society that is supporting the 2018 Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction. The case study also highlights a specifically Mongolian climatic phenomenon, an extreme winter, and the localized preparedness initiatives that are undertaken by local actors and communities.

References for this Case Study

1. The Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment Study 2014 – Mongolia
2. Australian Red Cross Internal Evaluation: Reducing vulnerability and building resilience in response to hazards and risks in Mongolia, September 2015
3. Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction project design documentation

Various types of winter shelters that were designed and built by herder beneficiaries together with assistance from Red Cross mid-level branches. | MRCS



Collaborators for this Case Study:

Mongolian Red Cross Society,
Australian Red Cross,
International Federation of
Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

Contact Person for this Case Study:

Munguntuya Sharavnyambuu
Disaster Management Programme Manager,
Mongolian Red Cross Society
Email: munguntuya.sh@redcross.mn