

The wealth of Kharaa

(Community gardens as an alternative to livestock and a way to combat land degradation)

Project No: MON/05/08

Grantee Organization: “Esun balt” CBO

Location: Bayangol soum, Selenge province

SGP Contribution: \$ 8,165

Cash Co-Financing: \$ 5,200

In-Kind Co-Financing: \$ 2,302

Project Duration: May 2005 – April 2006

Focal area: Land degradation

Background

Land degradation is one of the most pressing concerns in Mongolia, including desertification. According to Ministry of Environment and Green Development, 78% of pastureland is degraded and 20% has a tendency towards degradation. Some of the human-induced causes include overgrazing, unsustainable farming practices, weak law enforcement, and extensive migration of herder families to urban areas.

Project Objectives and Key Activities

To combat soil erosion and land degradation in the region and to improve livelihoods of community members, the “Esun balt” community-based organization created an initiative to develop a community garden in a soil eroded and pasture degraded land to demonstrate that fruit planting is a win-win option and a good alternative to livestock herding.

The main activities of the project included: fencing, land cultivation, tree plantation, creation of a wind protection belt and the establishment of a tree nursery to raise seedlings.

Sea buckthorn is one of the most resilient fruit trees to grow in the harsh continental climate conditions of Mongolia, it also has high regenerative capabilities, and is useful in keeping water and soil moisture balanced in river banks.



As such, the sea buckthorn is being used to combat soil erosion and land degradation, for creating green belts and to fix sand movement. About 800 sea buckthorn seedlings along with many other fruit trees including black currant, apple, wild cherry, raspberry and sweet brier were planted by the community.

The project also established a wind protection belt and a community tree nursery with capacity of producing about 50,000 tree seedlings a year.

To raise awareness about the importance of combating land degradation, the community also cooperated with a local TV station and newspaper.

Environmental Impact

Before the project implementation, the land was empty, overgrazed, degraded and suffered from droughts frequently. After the project, the land not only is fully recovered but became one of the first community-owned fruit gardens in the country. The project also provides food security.

Today, the community can harvest up to 5 tons of sea buckthorn, 300 kg of black currant and some quantities of other berries. Furthermore, through the project, the community has been able to invest in farm equipment and start beekeeping, harvesting 200 kg of honey from their 15 bee colonies every year since 2009. To help marketing the products, in 2018, the community established a store to sell agro-biodiversity related products supplied by several SGP communities from four provinces.



The community is now deeply engaged in the protection of Kharaa river ecosystem, organizing awareness raising events, and providing advice and on-site-trainings for village residents and families. In fact, the concept of protecting and conserving the nature while generating profits, has now spread around many communities in the country.

One of the key innovations of the project is the fact that the initiative was led and implemented entirely by a herder group to combat land degradation and soil erosion.

This represents an important change in behavior and change of priorities in the herder sector, as Mongolian herders are commonly involved in livestock. The project also involved the local authority, and as a result, the local Governor and other authorities have been supporting sustainable projects and added environmental sustainability as an element in the planning process of the village.

Socio-Economic Impact

More than 220 individual families in the village now benefit from the community garden and many are now planting trees in their living places. However, one of the main benefits of the project is on the governance structure of CBOs in Mongolia.



The governance of CBOs in Mongolia is based on democratic processes used by their voluntary members. While early CBOs were still informal, the project has help create a set of rules to guide election of community council and leaders, establish transparent management of community funds, and it has also help groups with planning, implementation and monitoring of their own activities.

The “Wealth of the Kharaa river” Initiative has benefited from both formal and customary governance models and its

leaders and many members now themselves own a huge body of knowledge on community governance that is shared broadly.

Since 2005 the project has continued to grow and expand on a yearly basis and the annual income of every member of the community has increased by at least 3 times. Eight families have gotten out poverty and are now able to invest in their children education and health. The project site has become a workplace for all family members: elder or younger, educated or not educated.

Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

SGP ensures equal participation of both men and women from project design to implementation, however, through the involvement in the project, women have also been empowered and assumed leadership positions in areas usually done by men.

At the beginning of the project the roles of women were modest: assistance in planting trees, planting seeds in greenhouse and sometimes irrigating. Through the development of the project their roles have increased by actively participating in harvesting, fruit processing, and selling products.

Replication, scaling-up and policy impact

As the initiative is a win-win solution with regard to land degradation and livelihoods improvement, to date, this option has proved to be so successful that some other community members and herders have started to follow. The initiative has been replicated by 4 neighboring communities and scaled up by three private companies in Bayangol soum alone. The local government also supported this community activity and called on many others to follow their example, contributing to the replication and scaling up success of the initiative.



Community leader Mr.Dagvadorj.P, one of the active grantee partners, has presented the model to other communities and SGP grantees from other soums and provinces as the project is located at one of the busy roads in the region. Many people passing through the project site stop and talk to Mr.Dagvadorj.P for advice on how to replicate the model. Some of them even ask for permission to enter the garden. Recently, a community training center was created nearby, and will allow Mr.Dagvadorj.P to spread the model and

his “know how”, as he will be one of the trainers, focusing on seedlings raising and tree planting.

Finally, this project as well as the result of other SGP projects in the area have contributed to the decision of the local authority to become a green village.

“If community members are united and understand each other well, everything can be done successfully”. Mr. Dagvadorj, Community Leader.