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SUCCESS STORY

Leveraging Science, Preserving Pastoral Livelihoods in Mongolia

USAID is working with herders and local officials to strengthen disaster preparedness and build resilience to disasters that threaten pastoral livelihoods in Mongolia.



Photo courtesy of USAID

For Bayanmunkh and his family, nomadic herders in western Mongolia, USAID-supported weather forecasts inform daily decisions such as when to shear animals or remain in a sheltered camp to mitigate animal losses during winter storms.



Photo courtesy of USAID

USAID-supported trainings are helping herders such as Sharavjamts to practice more resilient pastoral management strategies.

For centuries, nomadic herders in Mongolia have relied on ecological knowledge and traditional practices to ensure the survival of livestock during extreme winters, known locally as *dzuds*. Climate change, however, is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, threatening the sustainability of pastoral livelihoods. From November 2015–April 2016, Mongolia experienced extremely low temperatures and heavy snowfall that adversely affected livestock and livelihoods throughout the country. Compounded by the previous summer’s drought, the *dzud* caused an estimated 1.1 million livestock deaths, affecting nearly 226,000 people or 41 percent of Mongolia’s herder population, according to the UN.

Since 2013, USAID has supported Mercy Corps to build resilience among herders and local officials in *dzud*-prone areas of Mongolia. With USAID support, Mercy Corps is training communities, herders, and local authorities in disaster planning, preparation, and response, as well as in livestock-based emergency interventions. Mercy Corps is also working to ensure that communities have access to location-specific pasture data and weather forecasts through a text messaging service.

Although snow accumulations in some of the most severely affected areas—including parts of western Mongolia’s Zavhan Province—reached a 50-year high during the 2016 *dzud*, livestock deaths remained significantly lower than in previous *dzuds* due to increased preparedness efforts, access to critical pasture and weather information, and timely humanitarian assistance supported by USAID.

Sharavjamts, a nomadic herder in Zavhan, was introduced to the messaging service and several research-based *dzud* preparedness techniques during a USAID-supported training in his community. The USAID-supported training aimed to both increase access to early warning tools and share a collection of best practices in livestock management—known as the Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards toolkit—which, when combined, empowered Sharavjamts to mitigate animal losses during the 2015/2016 *dzud*. Sharavjamts continues to rely on the message-based system for real-time weather forecasts that inform his daily decisions and shares this vital information with other herders he encounters.