

## GENDER ROLES IN GRASSLAND MANAGEMENT IN MONGOLIA

**Kh. Ykhanbai, Ts. Odgerel,  
B. Naranchimeg, E. Bulgan and  
Sustainable Management Common Natural Resource team**

*From the findings it was clear that unpaid and unvalued work for women have increased after the herd privatization took place; on average, more than 70 percent of the work in herders' families is carried out by women, although women have fewer rights and opportunities to participate in the collective decision-making most of them support the idea of co-management of natural resources. By establishing women groups in the communities, decision-making role of women have increased in natural resources management.*

### 1. Background

Mongolia is a country, which has continental, extremely different climate and is located in the Central Asia, bordered by the Russia in the North, China in the East. It has a land area of approximately 1.56 million square kilometers (km<sup>2</sup>) and population of 2.4 million that makes it one of the most sparsely populated countries in the world (0.6 km<sup>2</sup>). Grasslands make up approximately 82 percent of the land area are currently home to 23.9 million head of livestock (82,7 percent - goat and sheep, 17,3 percent - horse, cattle and camel) and 175,900 herding families (NSO, 2002). Grasslands are the principal renewable natural resource in Mongolia, which are fragile, highly susceptible to degradation, and slow to recover from degradation.

In history and in our traditions private ownership of pastureland has never existed and grasslands have always been state property and been used commonly by herders or customary groups according to their livelihood needs. During the soviet-era (1921-1990) citizens had no rights to possess livestock. They used state pasturelands to herd state animals for a salary in accordance with seasonal grazing movement schemes and pasture use regulations adopted by the administration of collectives and state entities. Mongolia began its transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy in the early 1990's, promoting democracy, decentralization and privatization. As a result of the privatization process since 1992, all livestock are now privately owned; grasslands, however, remain under state property and are used commonly. Between 1992 and 2000 herder households increased 2.5 times and livestock numbers increased by 17.5 percent and pasture management authority and responsibility was also devolved to the local level governments and herders.

Currently some estimates show that more than 76 percent of the country's pasturelands are subject to overgrazing and desertification. Apart from the climate change due to global warming, the increase in animal numbers after privatization until 1999 and uncontrolled concentration of animals around water sources, settlement areas, hay lands, and seasonal camps may be some parts of the reason of this. Herders desire to increase their herd size and livestock numbers as means of survival in competitive market condition, because pastures and grasslands are common resource and it has low entry costs compared to other opportunities. Therefore it needs to establish a co-management system of grasslands and

herd management, as individual herders cannot properly manage these herding systems without the involvement of community management and cooperation and with both local and central government support.

**Co-management of pasture is needed** as pasture is used as common resource and although private ownership of livestock is allowing herders for business orientation, it could not be inline with the capacity of pasture and the interest of neighboring herders. State ownership of grasslands needs government regulation of its use and lack of capacity of herders and local government for sustainable management of pasture resources requires participation of other stakeholders at sectors and national levels. Several national policies and laws impact CBNRM and co-management of grassland resources. The new Land Law (2002) introduces long-term pasture use contracts for herder groups and communities, with local governments, if they have jointly defined roles and responsibilities to ensure sound use, restoration and protection of these already degraded grasslands. In The Land Law and in other legal documents local governors are responsible and given rights to solve herders' movements between neighboring *sums (districts) and aimags (province)*.

The “Sustainable Management of Common Natural Resources in Mongolia” (*SUMCNR*) project, which is supported by IDRC (International Development Research Center), Canada, and being implemented by Ministry of Nature and Environment in collaboration with other Ministries and agencies and NGO's, aims to improve the management herd and grasslands and natural resource by implementing co-management approaches in selected study sites. The project is addressing this challenge through a combination of participatory and action-oriented field research in three of Mongolia's major ecosystems, representing varying degrees of population pressure and market access. Currently, more than 10 community or herder groups exist in the project area, with from about 13 to 32 herding families in each group. Each group is considered a relatively homogeneous economic or social unit in terms of family, language, historical, ecosystem and other type of characteristics. In the selected study sites, all stakeholders in pasture and NRM (National Resource Center) are broadly participating in the co-management activities. Co-management agreements between the community and its members, community and local governors have documented. Roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders are agreed upon during the formal and informal meetings and discussions. PRA meetings at the start allowed individuals and others to understand one another better.

**Co-management teams:** *Sum* (district) Level Co-Management Teams (SLCMT) are established in the each study site consisting of representatives of herders, communities, local governors, NGO's, school and other local organizations, as well as researchers from the project team.

**Co-management contracts:** In the each community Co-management (CM) contracts (agreements) are created between the herders and Community; and Community and *Bag* (sub-district) and *Sum* (district) Governors.

Herders are more likely to cooperate in pastureland management when they also have an interest in working together on other activities that have a more immediate bearing on their livelihoods. Support facilitated by the project through: training activities (Pasture management, NRM, vegetation growing, raw material processing, handicraft making, sewing, reforestation, seeding of hay lands, PM&E), networking and experience sharing between groups (participation of herders to the inter-site meetings and visits, farmer to farmer visits), and institutional support (small credit scheme, community funds, community

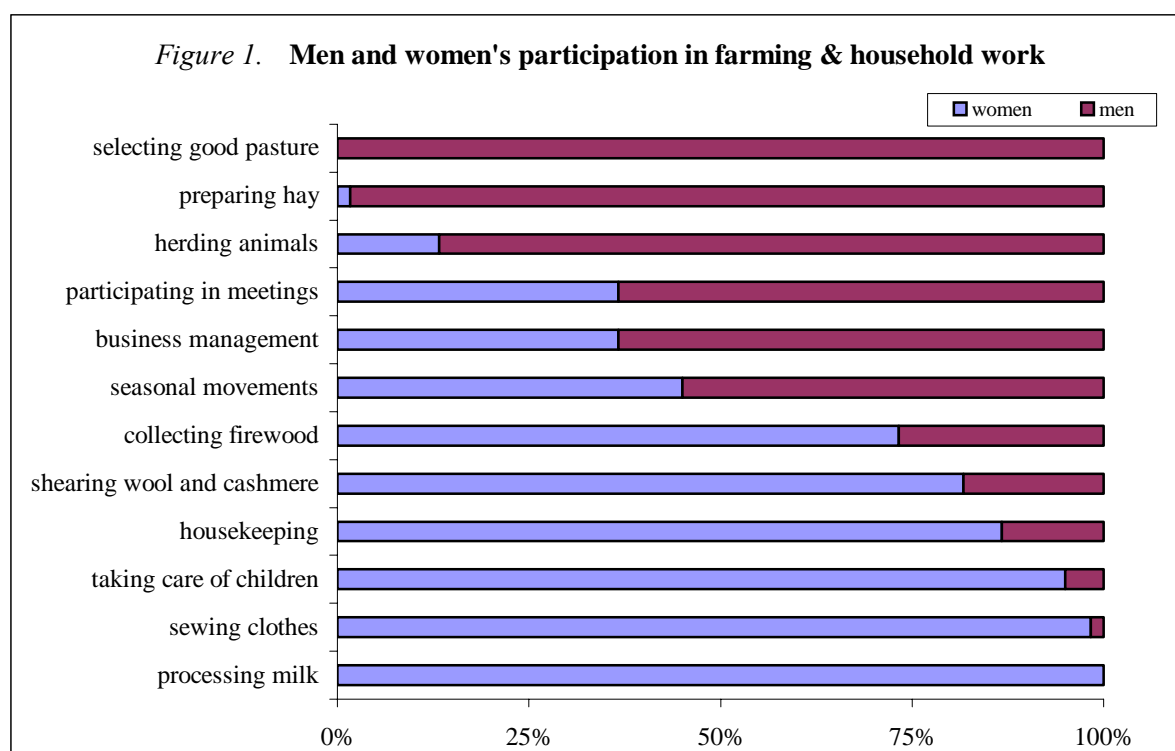
projects, information database in the *sum* centers or supporting the set-up of community rules, community councils and women groups, and so on.).

## 2. Gender roles in PNRM (Pasture and Natural Resource Management)

Although both women and men play important, but different roles in the management of natural resources in Mongolia's nomadic pastoralism, women's particular roles and participation in natural resource use, decision-making and implementation have been undervalued. In many cases, in research and in policy-making, women's knowledge and abilities are "simply" forgotten or neglected.

Labor distribution and responsibilities among men and women in herding households are shown in Figure 1.

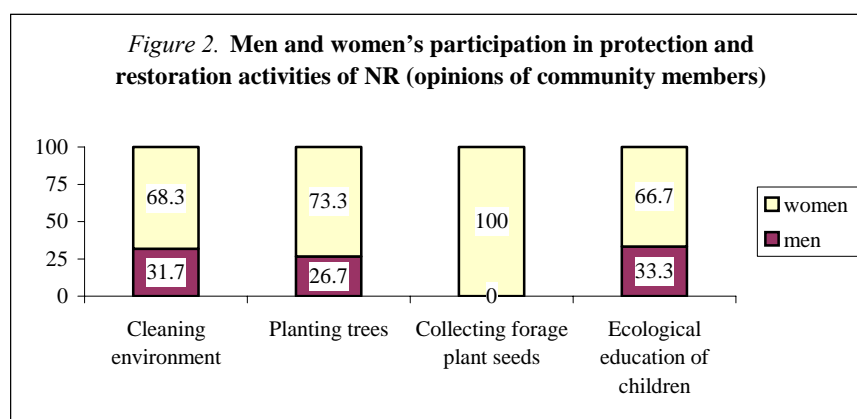
Women have the same roles as men in the pastoral animal husbandry and they are also occupied with many other household works and taking care of food, clothes, and health of their children and members of the family. Labor distribution in herding households keeps the national tradition in relation to the specifics of pastoral animal husbandry that makes men and women's duties and responsibilities different.



*Source: Ts. Odgerel, SUMCNR project researcher, Report of the survey on "Labor distribution of men and women herders in the 3 study sites", 2002.*

Men usually do most important work (in the outside of the household) particularly, selecting pasture, haymaking, herding animals, participating in meetings, business management and etc. However, almost of the men's work is seasonal. But women's work is continuing whole day. They usually do repetitive housework particularly, processing milk, taking care of children, housekeeping and etc., In other words, daily workload of women is higher than men, but almost of the work is unpaid. So women workload hinders their

participation in the community decision-making on NRM. Therefore, by decreasing women's workload, it is possible to increase their participation in the NRM.



Source: Ts. Odgerel, Study report "Gender role in micro, mezzo, macro levels" 2003.

Traditionally, women have great roles in protecting natural resources such as cleaning the environment, giving their children knowledge and education about "Human and Environment", and teaching them the traditional custom of appropriate use and protection of natural resources while men have more roles in decision making such as participating in the community meeting and making agreements with Community leader representing their household.

### **Case 1:**

*"... Mongolians have long tradition of natural conservation. Women have great roles in keeping that tradition as they teach their children how to protect and sound use nature. Also cleaning campsites, protecting rivers, and spas are usually done by women. But due to busy housework hinder women to participate in the PNRM".*

*(D, female, member of a community)*

### **Changes since co-management**

In the beginning period of the implementing co-management, there was no common understanding on gender equal participation in NRM, but now this attitude has changed. Herders and other stakeholders in co-management have started to understand the importance of the women's roles in the decision-making for creating sustainable system of co-management. Also the communities' herders' knowledge on sound use and protection of PNRM and skill and ability to use in real life has improved and also understanding on gender issues has improved.

### **Case 2:**

*"... Since the co-management, now herders' more likely to cooperate on natural resource management. Their knowledge and motivation to protect and restore NR have improved, especially women's role and participation in NRM increased in our sum's communities. Now women and men equally participate in the adoption of co-management agreements. Women's participation in the decision-making and implementation process have increased, for example women group of*

*Lun sum's community initiated restoration of degraded winter and spring pastures through reseeded".*  
(D, male, Sum governor)

However, the understanding about gender equal participation in NRM, the labor distribution of the men and women has not changed yet. Because quite a lot time to be need it. But we cannot say that there is no change. Because women still more active to participate in community meetings and they started to express their opinions.

### **Women group**

According to the understanding of herders about gender equal participation, each community has supported women activities and participation, so their establishment women group is one of the implementing activities of the co-management.

#### **Case 3:**

*"... Women have clear roles in natural resource management. By establishing the women group, women joined, and are sharing opinions, making joint decisions, and helping each other".*  
(M, female, secretary of community)

As a result of the establishment of women groups in all communities now women are more involved in the community decision-making: they more participate in community meetings, they freely express their ideas and report on the women group activities to other members.

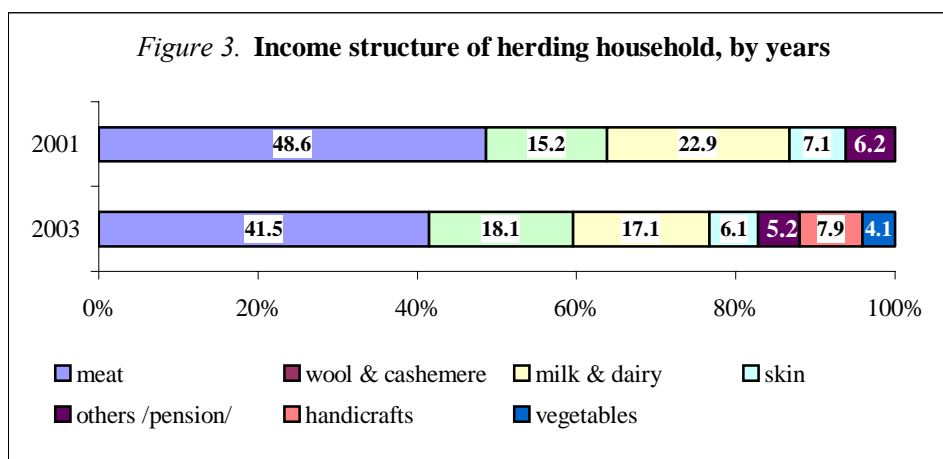
## **4. Income generation and gender**

The only source of the community herders' income is animal husbandry, which leads to overuse of the pasture. Creation of additional income generation ways is as important as it can improve the community households' livelihoods and solve the ecological problems or i.e. pasture degradation.

Location, closeness to market centers, infrastructure, cultural and socio-economic conditions of study sites are greatly impact in the implementation of co-management of natural resources. For example, in Deluin SS culture, traditional custom, and close kinship relations become positive factors for implementing co-management. In Khotont SS, herders' interest increases as they have limited pasture area (herders live close to each other) and remoteness of market center requires joint cooperation. But as for Lun SS, the households are more business oriented and interested in individual business due to their closeness to the market center and good infrastructure.

The changing of income structure shows in Figure 3.

In 2001, the herding households were finding income from meat, milk/dairy, wool/cashmere, skin and other sources such as pension of aged people. But now they have had additional sources of income without animal products. It comes from planting vegetables and making handicrafts. The additional source of income is very important for livelihood of the herding households. Because they actually understood that it is dangerous to find income only from animal husbandry according to natural disaster encountered in the last 4 years.



Source: Dr. Ts.Tserenbaljir, project researcher, Report of the research on “community herders income and expenditure survey”, 2004

In the herding households, women play main roles in additional income generation. The following interventions are taken from the project in order to create additional income sources for the communities:

- Making handicrafts with animal skin and sheep wool: Community representatives attended in the felt-making training course in the city and received wool-processing equipment from the project. Community women make clothes and other handicrafts with felt for their use or selling. As the result of this activity herding households income increased and also women started to have their “own” money, which gives them one of the possibilities to establish their own fund to support women’s participation in NRM.
- Growing vegetables: Communities in 3 study sites are growing potatoes and other vegetables, which becomes one alternative income source for the households.
- Small funds to support women’s income generation activities: This year project funded women’s small-scale income generation project.
- Herders who live in Khangai mountain forest-steppe ecosystem used to collect and use natural plants such as fruits and some medicinal herbs for only their household consumption. But now they have collected it for selling without their consumption.

The project pays more attention to supporting women’s co-management activities which relative to increas in household income. Some of the women are attended felt-making training in Darkhan city in 2001 according to support of the project for improving capacity of the women.

This year project financed small-scale projects proposed by the women groups of the communities. The small projects proposed by the women concern mainly on livelihood issues, increasing additional income by making felt and handicrafts, growing vegetables, and increasing community fund, or natural management issues like protecting forest, reseeding pasture, and so on.

### **Market-oriented (cash-income)**

Before implementing co-management, herding households used animal products originally for their consumption. Currently, they have had a interest to sell the animal products. Especially, women have more interest to sell animal and other products such as milk/dairy and hadicrafts which are made by themselves. Because their work have started to give benefits (income) them. In other words, their unpaid work still give them benefits and people have paid them for their products.

## 5. Women's participation in CM

Community based Natural Resources Management as combination of community based and Government based management of NR. Thus, CO-MANAGEMENT is a governance arrangement between the pure state property and the pure communal property regimes.

*Why co-management of pasture is needed?*

- \* Pasture as common resource
- \* Private ownership of livestock is allowing herders for business orientation, but it could be inline with the capacity of pasture and the interest of neighboring herders
- \* State ownership of grasslands needs government regulation of its use
- \* Lack of capacity of herders and local government for sustainable management of pasture resources needs participation of other stakeholders at sectoral and national levels

The *SUMCNR* project pays special attention to social and gender analysis. One of the main research questions the project addresses is: "How to include the perceptions (ideas, interests, and propositions) of women groups into more equitable co-management agreements for grasslands and other natural resources?" The research methods used to study this question include group discussions, interviews, questionnaire, and participatory appraisal techniques such as seasonal diagramming, and mapping. Statistical methods are used for the analysis of findings.

The study involves 9 herding communities that have been established on the basis of local herders' grasslands use co-management contracts with local governors. These communities are located in the 3 study sites of the *SUMCNR* project representing the different ecosystems of Mongolia (the sites are Khotont in the Khangai mountain forest-steppe/steppe ecosystem; Deluin in the Altai's high mountain-steppe ecosystem; and Lun in the Central Mongolian steppe ecosystem.) All stakeholders in natural resource management including community members, women's groups, community leaders, local governors, *sum* level co-management team members, and researchers are involved in the research.

To clarify the women's ideas on co-management of NR, we surveyed opinions of the 461 women members from 220 herding families from 9 communities.

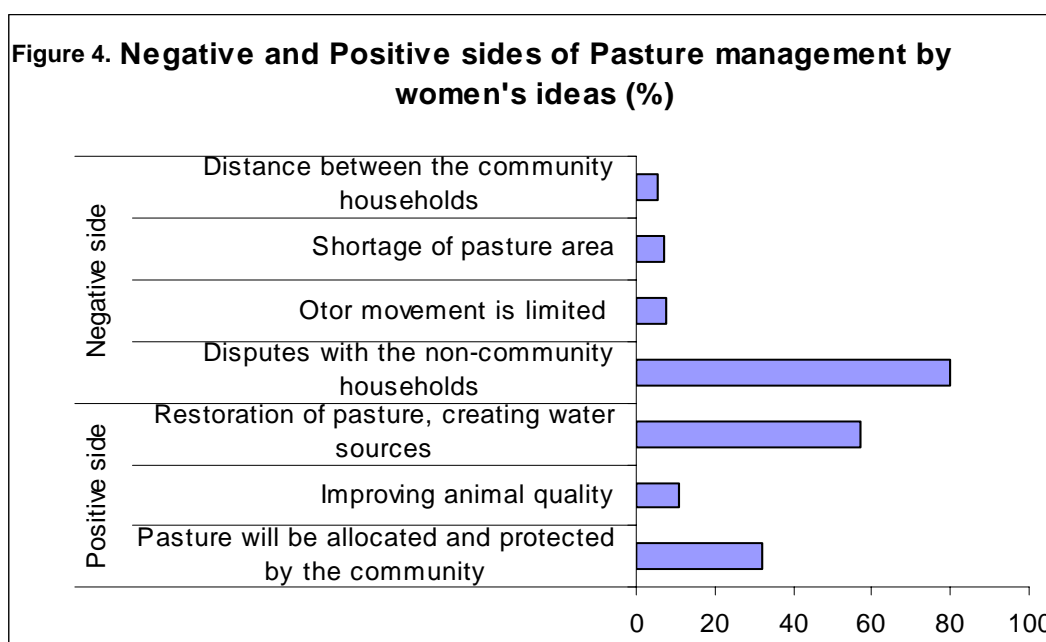
*According to the survey from the women members of the communities the following ideas are defined as important goals of co-management. They are:*

- To cooperate, to have common goals
- To plan their activities and to work with certain goals
- Improving knowledge on NRM
- Sound use of pasture and other NR
- Improving herding management, improving productivity of animals
- Improving livelihoods and income of the households
- Learning laws and rules related to herders and pasture
- To support and increase women's participation in CM activities

### ***Including women's ideas and perceptions in co-management agreements***

Although women have fewer rights and opportunities to participate in the collective decision-making about natural resource management or other community affairs, most of

them support the idea of co-management of natural resources when co-management is connected to improving their livelihoods.



Source: B. Naranchimeg, "Women's participation in co-management", 2003

*During the survey on including women's ideas and perceptions to CM agreements the following ideas on revising co-management agreements are suggested by the women. Generally, the women's ideas on revising co-management agreements are divided into two attitude:*

**1. Representing women's interest:**

- *Community leader must involve men and women members' ideas in the decision-making and he must share and introduce his ideas before making decisions.*
- *Involving women in the decision-making*
- *To support women's participation in additional income generation activities like making felt and handicrafts, processing dairy products, growing vegetables, and so on.*

**2. About improving co-management agreements:**

- *Co-management activities among community and non-community herders should be organized and activated by the sum governor*
- *Bag governor should meet the community people once every semester and deliver community people's opinion to higher level of government and link the local government policy.*
- *Marketing of community products should be organized jointly with the assistance of the community accountant, sum and bag governors*
- *Community leader should take care of the community members' livelihoods and take measures to increase the community members' livelihoods in relation with the natural resource sound use, protection, and restoration issues.*
- *Some outstanding members should be prized.*
- *To clarify the what measures should be taken in case of community member's failure of the responsibilities.*



- *Community members should co-operate, exchange experiences on NRM with each other, and participate actively in the community activities and training*

The main direct result of this study so far has been the revision and updating of grasslands co-management agreements between communities and local governors. These agreements now reflect community women's ideas and perceptions. They also recognize the need to fully involve women in (future) stakeholder meetings.

## 6. Outcomes of the research

In summary:

- *Interests and perceptions of social groups of herding communities, as women, men are different by the ecological zones, cultures and local traditions, as well as the capacity and diversity of pasture land and natural resources.*
- Women in all study sites have great roles in educating children, production of milk and dairy, and processing of the animal raw products and this stereotype is traditionally considered as the women's duties in the herders' family. The unpaid, unvalued jobs for women have been increased after the herd privatization and more than 70 percent of work in herder's family belongs to the woman. But most of these work unvalued and underestimated. So inclusion of these responsibilities to CM agreements can strengthen communities by more active involvement of women.
- Traditionally women have less right in participating in the *community* meetings or collective decision-making. Therefore inclusion of their interest in the CM agreements makes NRM arrangements more sustainable. The request of Women group of communities to include new articles that reflected the women's roles and responsibilities in NRM is positively accepted by men community members and all stakeholders.
- Most of the women support CM activities and their aspirations were usually connected to improving their livelihoods and protection and restoration of pasture and other natural resources.
- In the herders community women are active in the implementation of CM agreements, as they are creative and initiative to the income generation and other activities.
- Establishment of Women groups increases possibility to participate in the decision-making of NRM for women. It also organizes different activities to support women's household income generation activities.
- *CM agreements between herder and community, and between community and local governors, were revised and updated by reflecting women's ideas and perceptions, which before left out of the consideration, which was main output of this study.*

*Outcomes of the research so far are:*

- *Establishment of the co-management system at sum level: currently 9 communities are established in 3 ecosystems*
- *Women groups are established and organizing various activities to support women, to improve their participation in co-management*
  - Women's participation in co-management increased as the co-management agreements are revised and updated by involving women's ideas and including incentives to support women's participation
  - Communities are more focused on capacity building of women through various training and exchange of experiences with other communities
  - Women groups started to pay more attention to natural resource management as they are carrying out various activities to protect and restore natural resources as designing

pasture-shifting plans, transplanting trees and reseeding pasture besides carrying out income generation activities.

- Traditionally women have great roles in protecting natural resources like cleaning the environment, giving their children ecological education, and teaching them the traditional custom of appropriate use and protection of natural resources while men have more roles in decision-making like selecting pasture, making agreements on pasture use, and participating in the meetings.
- By joining in the community men and women's work loads are reduced somehow like they together doing some work as shifting pasture, making hay, moving to seasonal pastures, shearing sheep, and many other.

## LIST OF REFERENCES

1. B. Naranchimeg “Women’s Participation in Co-management of NR”, 2003, *SUMCNR* project
2. “Gender” Readings and Recourses for CBNRM researchers, Volume 1, CBNRM Initiative IDRC, Dec. 1998, Ottawa, Canada
3. H.Ykhanbai and others “ Sustainable Management of Common Natural Resources in Mongolia”, MNE-IDRC project technical reports,2002,2003, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia
4. Karen Mc.A., and Ronnie Vernooy “ Action and Reflection: A guide for Monitoring and Evaluating PR”, Sep.1999, Ottawa, Canada
5. National Programme on Gender equality. 2002, Government of Mongolia
6. R. Vernooy. 2000. China. Insights from the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Community-Based Natural Resource Management Workshop
7. Social /gender analysis in Natural resource management” learning stories first workshop. 2001. China
8. Ts. Odgerel “Gender role in NRM – macro, mezzo, micro levels”, 2003, *SUMCNR* project
9. ‘Women in Mongolia: Mapping Progress under Transition’ UNIFEM, 2001