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Institution ranking and social mapping in rural Mongolia

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• Introduction

A wide variety of institutions currently exist in rural Mongolia, following the dismantling of the pastoral collectives (*negdel*) and their partial replacement by various forms of joint stock and limited liability companies and cooperatives (*horshoo*). Apart from these formal organisations, informal community institutions exist. These are the main context in which pastoral livestock production is carried out. The question of what institutions will take over the functions of the former collectives is still very much open. PRA methods were used to try to understand holders' perceptions of the various institutions they participate in.

• Social mapping

Social mapping of local institutions is an adaptation of the wealth ranking technique and was used to identify the composition of informal neighbourhood communities. This 'methodological innovation' can use the same cards used for wealth ranking. It may be carried out in sequence with wealth ranking, although in a community of 100-200 households, this would result in an excessively long interview.

The method is simply to ask an individual or small group of informants to divide the pile of cards representing the whole community into progressively smaller piles, according to the different levels of local group identified by the informant(s).

At each stage of subdivision, the household reference numbers marked on the cards are recorded. If relevant, the geographical locations of the group can be mapped. At the lowest level, where individual *khot ail* (herders' base camps) are identified, other information was gathered. This included genealogies to identify kinship relations between members of *khot ail* and (where relevant and possible) their neighbours.

Table 1 shows the main pastoral institutions at different scale levels during the three periods: pre-collectivisation, collectivisation, and contemporary de-collectivisation. While there has been greater continuity in pastoral organisation at the local level than is often realised, local institutions during these distinct periods have, by turns, been suppressed, transformed, re-introduced or have re-emerged.

Table 1. Historical evolution of Mongolian pastoral institutions

Scale level	Order of Magnitude (households)	Pre-collectivisation (1930s)	Collectivisation (1930s-1980s)	Decollectivisation & Transition (1990s)
Encampment	1 1-2 2 2-12	herding family <i>sakhaltiin ail</i> <i>jarsiin ail</i> <i>khot ail</i>	herding family <i>suur</i> <i>sakhaltin ail</i>	herding family <i>sakhaltiin ail</i> <i>khot ail</i>
Neighbourhood	20-50 50-100 100-250	<i>neg nutgiinhan bag</i>	team (<i>khesege</i>) brigade	<i>neg nutgiinhan</i> cooperative (<i>horshoo</i>) <i>bag</i>
Administrative Unit	500-1000 1 000-1 500 10 000	<i>khoshun</i> <i>aimag</i>	collective (<i>negdel</i>) district (<i>sum</i>) province (<i>aimag</i>)	company district (<i>sum</i>) province (<i>aimag</i>)

• Matrix ranking and scoring

Other methods used included matrix ranking and scoring. These were used mainly to understand herders' perceptions about the institutions of which they are members and in which they participate.

First a general discussion is held around the issue of local institutions, their functions and how they have changed over time. The names of the various institutions identified are then written on cards. The cards are offered to the informant for pairwise comparison until all possible combinations have been exhausted. In order to make the comparison, the herder is asked: 'Which of these two institutions is the most important to you, and why?'

The six or so most frequently mentioned criteria form the rows of a matrix, the columns of which are given by the names of the institutions themselves. The matrix is then completed systematically, either by ranking (in ascending

order) the institutions against each of the criteria in turn, or by awarding a score (e.g. from one to five) to each institution for each criterion.

Table 2 shows the matrix ranking and scoring of institutions as perceived by Dangaasuren of Tariat district in the central forest/mountain steppes of Mongolia. The most important institution to him was the *khot ail*, for collective management of herds and family labour. This was consistently ranked top, except on the criterion of sharing the use of a vehicle. It was discovered on closer questioning that this criterion implied for him the joint ownership of the vehicle and he felt the *khot ail* was too small an institution to own such a lumpy asset.

The *neg jalgynhan* ('people of one valley') was consistently ranked next highest. At the other end of the scale Dangaasuren ranked the district administration bottom on all criteria, implying that it was almost completely irrelevant to him.

Table 2. Matrix ranking and scoring of institutional preferences, Tariat District

Criteria:	<i>horshoo</i> (cooperative)	<i>sum</i> (district)	<i>negdel</i> (former collective)	<i>khot ail</i> (herders' base camp)	<i>bag</i> (lowest administrative unit of state)	<i>neg jalgyghan</i> (‘people of one valley’ - a neighbourhood community)
Members have strong common interest	4 (5)*	6 (0)	5 (0)	1 (5)	2 (4)	3 (4)
Communication between members is easy	4 (4)	6 (0)	5 (0)	1 (5)	3 (4)	2 (5)
It is easy to reach a decision collectively	4 (2)	6 (0)	5 (0)	1 (5)	3 (3)	2 (4)
It is possible for members to share the use of a vehicle	3 (-)	6 (-)	4 (-)	5 (-)	2 (-)	1 (-)
There is good contact between leader(s) and members	4 (4)	6 (0)	5 (5)	1 (5)	3 (5)	2 (4)
It is easy to organise collective activities	4 (4)	6 (0)	5 (4)	1 (5)	3 (5)	2 (5)

*Note: 4 (5) = Rank (Score)

Informant: Dangaasuren, *horshoo* (cooperative) member

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NOTE

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