

Building development under climate change in arid Mongolia. Modernisation, globalization, adaptation.

Natural resource-dependent people are increasingly challenged in adapting to climate changes, especially in arid and semi-arid areas. As these regions correspond by and large to developing or transition economies, adaptation to climatic changes will inevitably depend on national development strategies and political and economic circumstances. The presentation illustrates these interactions of environmental and political-economic factors with the case from arid Mongolia.

Mongolian pastoralists are increasingly affected by a combination of difficult climate conditions and debilitating economic circumstances. They have been exposed to increasingly more frequent and severe droughts, sand storms and winter disasters (*dzud*). In addition, their economies are increasingly dependent on a global cashmere market and are shaped by a national development strategy hinged on neoliberal principles of efficiency and budget discipline. Their main adaptation against climatic hazards, their mobility, depends on the terms of trade in cashmere and the interest rates of commercial loans. The Mongolian development strategy frames the pastoralist sector as a backward system in need of modernization towards an intensive, sedentary system based on private property. This vision is partly influenced by important international aid organizations (The Asian Development Bank, the IMF, Japan International Cooperation Agency, etc.), who have become stakeholders in the Mongolian development strategy and promote neoliberal policies that reduce the adaptive capacity of people. Moreover, large development aid funds have precluded a much needed fiscal reform that would allow affordable access to credit for herders and investment in the domestic cashmere processing industry.

The intersections between climate change and the Mongolian development strategies influence thus the adaptive capacity of resource users by exacerbating direct outcomes, creating debilitating contexts and feed-backs between economic and environmental challenges.

This example supports the recent approaches in development theory that argue for the necessity to move beyond the dependency/modernisation divide, towards a theory of developments (in the plural) that allows local particularities to inform development strategies. Local adaptations to climatic changes should in this context be understood as valuable starting points in framing an encompassing development strategy that fosters the needs of resource users and incorporates their knowledge.