Strategic planning for peatlands in Mongolia

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Mongolia

Mongolia’s peatlands cover almost 2% of the country, located in large river valleys and highlands. These naturally wet ecosystems preserve permafrost and sequester carbon, accumulate precipitation waters and serve as storage basins, maintaining wet habitats and pastures, feeding rivers, preventing soil erosion, supporting sufficient groundwater levels for forest and crop growth, and keeping wells full of water.

However, most Mongolian peatlands are being degraded or destroyed through overgrazing and mining-related activities, leading to dramatic changes in water regimes, drought and fires, permafrost thawing and peat oxidation followed by greenhouse gas emissions. Mongolia’s estimated emissions of degraded peatlands rank fifth at a global level, after Indonesia, European Union, Russian Federation and China, estimated at 45 million tonnes CO₂ equivalents per year. Currently, most Ramsar Sites in Mongolia exclude peatlands, covering only lakes and rivers s.s. while being situated next to peatlands that could easily be included. Mongolia submitted in 2010 intended nationally appropriate mitigation actions (NAMAs) to reduce climate change to the Climate Change Convention (UNFCCC). They include the limitation of livestock increase, but need also to include the reduction of peatland degradation and peatland restoration.

To this end, the Asian Development Bank, with financial support from the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction, launched a project on Strategic Planning for Peatlands, executed by the Mongolian Ministry of Environment and Tourism, in cooperation with Wetlands International. The project is producing i.a. a peatland inventory and organised a workshop in Kharkhorin on “Community-based peatland conservation and wise use strategies in Mongolia” on 25-29 July, with the help of international experts from Wetlands International, Greifswald Mire Centre, the German Man and the Biosphere Committee and the Ramsar Secretariat.

The workshop brought together about 40 specialists, mainly from the water management, protected areas and private sectors in different provinces, including representatives of NGOs, CSOs and research organisations. After introductions by the international experts on the
Permafrost peatland mapping with sophisticated technology used by the Russian-Mongolian field expedition functions of permafrost peatlands, on peatland restoration strategies and on site management tools provided by Biosphere Reserves and Ramsar Sites, the participants worked in smaller groups on site restoration and management. They got inspirations for their reflections through brief on-site visits in different key areas of the Orkhon river valley, including at the Ogii nuur Ramsar Site training and education centre, the World Heritage archaeological museum, the Russian-Mongolian field research site in the Lun peatlands, and the proposed pilot peatland restoration site in the Khashaat sum. For the starting pilot restoration activities, it is important to expand the socio-economic analyses of land-use patterns presented by the Mongolian Academy of Sciences. More working meetings are planned for the coming months, and it is hoped that the project outcomes will substantially contribute to peatland restoration and sustainable use practices being applied throughout Mongolia.

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