

Enhancing the  
resilience of reindeer  
herders' ecosystems  
and livelihoods



# Nomadic Herders

An international Indigenous Peoples' project  
endorsed by UNEP and the Arctic Council



## Ecosystem-based adaptation

Reindeer husbandry – like many other pastoral livelihoods – is affected by climate change, land degradation and changes in biodiversity. The pastoral economies and cultures, and the ecosystems on which they depend, are stressed by land degradation and loss of biodiversity due to increased infrastructure development, resource exploitation and other forms of human activities that create barriers to livestock mobility and pasture use.

Focusing on taiga reindeer herding communities in sub-Arctic Asia, the Nomadic Herders initiative addresses traditional knowledge, adaptation to climate change and protection of the environment. The initiative came from world reindeer herders themselves, following up the 4<sup>th</sup> World Reindeer Herders' Congress in 2009. It started in 2010 with funding from Norway and has now become a UNEP/Arctic Council internationally coordinated indigenous peoples' project in Sakha-Yakutia, Eastern Siberia, and northern Mongolia.

**The project provides a unique example of how UNEP and the Arctic Council engages to support both environmental issues and indigenous peoples at the community level.** The initiative has linkages to Sámi reindeer herding and institutions in Fennoscandia, and one aim is to replicate the project in other reindeer herding communities in the North.

Jointly with herders, local partners and national authorities, the project studies the impacts of land-use change and climate change on reindeer pastoralists, and further assesses the herders' adaptation options and opportunities.

The key objectives of the Nomadic Herders are to **increase the understanding of how changes in biodiversity are affecting reindeer herding societies**, and **enhance the capacity of the herders in biodiversity conservation and natural resource management.**



# Local stewardship and protection

## The project approach

This will be achieved by documenting and promoting herders' knowledge, and developing education strategies and management tools based on the co-production of traditional and scientific knowledge. Nomadic Herders also facilitates dialogue between various actors and stakeholders, helps build partnerships between reindeer herding communities, and supports and strengthens local institutions and indigenous participation in decision-making processes.

## Participation and co-learning

As a way of ensuring the project legacy, young reindeer herders from Mongolia, Sakha-Yakutia and Fennoscandia have been actively engaged in project activities, providing unprecedented opportunities to exchange knowledge and experiences with other herding

communities. Fully in line with the concept of Free Prior and Informed Consent, and building on ICR's bottom-up methodologies for co-production of knowledge, the participatory approach has helped build a foundation of trust with and among local partners.

## Wide endorsement

Nomadic Herders was endorsed by the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) at its 9<sup>th</sup> Session in New York in 2010. Two years later, the project was also endorsed by the Arctic Council's Conservation of Flora and Fauna Working Group (CAFF), which recognises the project's potential for promoting best practise in sustainable reindeer husbandry across the Arctic and sub-Arctic. The Nomadic Herders project is one of the very few Arctic Council endorsed projects run by Observers (UNEP and WRH), and led by indigenous peoples.

## GEF application

In April 2012, the Nomadic Herders was awarded a project preparation grant (PPG) by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) in order to develop a Full-Sized Project (FSP) focusing on biodiversity conservation and reduction of land degradation in Mongolia and Sakha-Yakutia. The PPG was submitted April 2016 to the GEF Secretariat for endorsement.

**If funded by the GEF, this will be the largest international collaboration project focusing on reindeer husbandry, Indigenous Peoples and the environment.**

# Some selected activities to date

With funding from the three Norwegian Ministries of Climate and Environment, Foreign Affairs, and Local Government and Modernisation, the Nomadic Herders initiative has started implementing activities and preparing for a full-scale GEF project.



In June 2011, project partners organized a community-based workshop in Tsagaannuur, the primary reindeer-herding district in northern Mongolia. The purpose of the workshop – and a subsequent field trip to two of the herders’ camps – was to consult with reindeer herders and stakeholders on land-use change and climate change impacts on the grazing lands, as well as to assess options for effectively meeting the challenges of reindeer husbandry in Mongolia. Consultations in Tsagaannuur provided critical input for a policy paper on reindeer husbandry in Mongolia commissioned by the Mongolian Ministry of Nature, Environment and Tourism (MNET), “[Changing Taiga: Challenges for Mongolia’s Reindeer Herders](#)”.



In 2012, a training workshop was held in Tsagaannuur to engage indigenous herding communities in local decision-making and co-management, to increase awareness about livelihoods of nomadic reindeer herding communities and to strengthen government commitment and engagement.



In November 2012, the project held an International Stakeholder Workshop in St. Petersburg, which gathered scientists, reindeer herders and government representatives to discuss themes and activities of the project. The meetings coincided with the 380th Anniversary of the Commonwealth between Russia and Yakutia.



March 2013, the project organized a workshop on “The Role of Youth in Preservation of Traditional Knowledge of Indigenous Peoples in the Arctic” was held in Yakutsk. The workshop brought together over 100 scientists and experts in the field of traditional knowledge, natural resources and environment, reindeer herders, representatives of indigenous peoples, the executive and legislative authorities, NGOs and the media. The event had the objective to explore relationship between biological diversity and reindeer herding practices. It was supported by the Government of Sakha Republic (Yakutia) and the UNESCO Office in Moscow.



The 2013 World Environment Day celebrations were hosted by Mongolia and included a seminar on “The Future for Reindeer Husbandry and Conservation in Mongolia’s Biodiversity Hotspot”. The seminar was co-arranged with the Mongolian Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment, and attended by some 50 representatives from reindeer herding, government, conservation authorities and academia. The seminar expanded dialogue and sharing of traditional knowledge, science, and differing perspectives on biodiversity management across the diverse group of participants.



In 2014, the project organized a field visit for a group of Russian and Mongolian reindeer herders and decision-makers to the Laponia World Heritage Site, enabling them to learn about a unique form of environmental governance that allows for biodiversity objectives and reindeer husbandry to co-exist successfully. Laponia is seen as a model of best practice that could be transferred to other reindeer herding regions.



In June 2015, a workshop on taiga reindeer husbandry was held at the Buryat State University with herders from taiga regions of Russia and Mongolia.



In August 2015, a Nosegcher workshop aimed to find active youth among indigenous peoples communities in the Republic Sakha (Yakutia). Thirteen young reindeer herders visited the JSC Khatystyr brigade #7 to discuss herders’ food cultures and challenges of taiga reindeer husbandry.



April 2016, the project offered a two-weeks intensive university-level course on reindeer herders’ traditional knowledge and conservation of biodiversity. The course was attended by 36 students representing seven different ethnic reindeer herding groups from Russia, Mongolia and Norway. As part of the course work, the students are documenting traditional knowledge about biodiversity, reindeer, land-use and food culture. The material gathered will be included in the knowledge-base of the Nomadic Herders GEF project

# Sustainable cultures and livelihoods

## Pastoralism

Pastoralism - extensive livestock production in the rangelands - is practiced by an estimated 500 million people worldwide in 75% of countries, encompassing nomadic communities, transhumant herders, agro-pastoralists, ranchers and others. In both developing and developed countries, pastoralists are very often Indigenous Peoples, who tend to be minority populations in their countries and sometimes significantly under-represented in decision-making processes.

Pastoralism provides a highly efficient way of managing drylands and high altitude ecosystems. In essence, pastoralists adapt their social and herding systems according to seasonal or spatial weather variability and the availability of fertile pastures.

Where pastoralism is practiced in accordance with traditional practices, and where indigenous knowledge and institutions are strong, the environmental outcomes are positive; biological diversity is enhanced and ecosystem integrity and resilience is maintained. However, where local institutions are undermined, and mobility and knowledge are constrained, pastoral environments are easily degraded. Pastoralists are increasingly under threat from legal, economic, social and political obstacles.

## Reindeer husbandry

Reindeer are the only semi-domesticated animals, which naturally belong to the north. There are about 24 different indigenous peoples in the world and around 2.5 million semi-domesticated reindeer on the Arctic tundra and sub-Arctic taiga. Taiga reindeer husbandry represents specific and ancient forms of reindeer husbandry still practised in the transition belt of subarctic evergreen forest and alpine tundra between the Arctic tundra and the drier Inner Asian steppes. It represents the southernmost extreme of reindeer husbandry in the world. Here, reindeer pastoralism has provided a sustainable way of land-use and managing the environment.

Estimates show that pastoralism is practiced on approximately 25% of the global land area, providing on average 10% of the world's meat production.





# Contact information

## National Coordinator, Russia

Mikhail Pogodaev, PhD

Nomadic Herders Foundation, Russia  
677011, Republic of Sakha Yakutia, Yakutsk,  
Government House #2, Lenina Street 30,  
311, +7(4112)422408, pogodaevm@gmail.com

## National Coordinator, Mongolia

Tsogtsaikhan Purev

The Taiga Nature Society P.O. Box-183  
Ulaanbaatar-46, Mongolia Bayangol district 15  
khoroo 29-33. Tel: 976-11-310317, 976-  
99075559, montaignature@gmail.com

## International Coordinators

Svein Disch Mathiesen, Professor, PhD

Project Leader, UArctic EALAT Institute,  
International Centre for Reindeer Husbandry.  
Tel: +47 905 24 116,  
svein.d.mathiesen@gmail.com

Kathrine Ivsett Johnsen

Project Manager, GRID-Arendal. Tel: +47 412  
34 581, kathrine.johnsen@grida.no



[www.reindeerportal.org](http://www.reindeerportal.org)



# The main Nomadic Herders partners

**Association of World Reindeer Herders (WRH)** is the international CSO/IPO for the World's indigenous reindeer herding peoples, spreading through 10 national states in the Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions. [ReindeerPortal.org](http://ReindeerPortal.org)

**International Centre for Reindeer Husbandry (ICR)** is a transboundary professional knowledge institution for world reindeer herders, established by the Norwegian Government by recommendations of the Arctic Council. ICR hosts the Secretariat of WRH. [ReindeerPortal.org](http://ReindeerPortal.org)

**GRID-Arendal** is a Norwegian non-profit centre established by the Norwegian Government to support UNEP in the field of environmental assessment, capacity-building, communications and outreach. [Grida.no](http://Grida.no)

**UArctic EALÁT Institute for Circumpolar Reindeer Husbandry (UEI)** is a virtual institute for research, education and outreach for world reindeer husbandry, with institutional partners in six countries. It was created by the University of the Arctic, a network for over 170 universities and institutes dedicated to Arctic education and science. [UArctic.org](http://UArctic.org)

**Taiga Nature Society** in Mongolia is the CSO/IPO for the indigenous Dukha reindeer herding people in Northern Mongolia, working for improvement of the situation for reindeer herders and protection of the Taiga nature. Taiga Nature Society is a member organization of Association of World Reindeer Herders.

**Nomadic Herders Foundation** in Sakha (Yakutia) was established in 2014 to support nomadic cultures and traditional practices of reindeer herding peoples. The foundation engages in the wellbeing of herders through projects focusing on education, training and socio-economic development.



## Related Sustainable Development Goals

**Goal 13:** Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts

**Goal 15:** Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss

**Goal 16:** Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels

