

Establishing Capacity for Visual Learning towards Sustainable Development – Transdisciplinary Collaboration in Mongolia

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Abstract: The complexity involved in nomadic livestock systems requires field-based facilitators who are not only knowledgeable in the conventional technical areas, such as livestock management and animal health, but also, and particularly, skilled in the planning of collective action and facilitation of information exchange and engagement. This involves the management of multiple stakeholders who tend to have diverse perspectives on and interests in the direction of development. As such, learning to recognise, understand, work with and reconcile diverse perspectives is important in the process of becoming an effective facilitator of rural development processes. Visual learning methodologies have proven to be effective in instigating such skills.

The Mongolian University of Life Sciences (MULS) has the ambition to explore innovative learning configurations to establish the ability to support the institutionalisation of sustainable development service provision. The significance of this new methodology specifically to the Mongolian context has been explored by MULS in a collaborative pilot initiative with The University of Queensland and Wageningen University and Research, through the development of short films on several aspects of livestock management and rural development that will support the delivery of professional development of officers and herders through distance learning platforms.

Considering that a specific advantage of the use of visual learning methods and digital interfaces is their perceived cost efficiency, particularly in a context of nomadic lifestyles in distant places, we would like to highlight that producing films is not by definition a “cheap” activity. The production of good quality films requires professionals who combine learning design and film making with agricultural knowledge and a genuine interest in rural realities. It is about efficient and effective investment in learning design. A film crew and expert team working on location once for the production of high quality films is not as expensive as touring groups of students around the country every year all over again. However, to get the right composition of crew and expert team together, combining subject matter competence and interest to work trans-disciplinarily, is a challenge. The Mongolia case showed that careful selection of the team is crucial, as well as timing and the process through which the team members adopt multiple roles.

In this paper the experiences are shared and a way forward is envisioned.