Guardians of the Grassland:
A Qualitative Assessment of the Success of Community-Based Wildlife Conservation in Mongolia's Eastern Steppe

World Learning SIT Study Abroad Mongolia

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Abstract

Community-based conservation is a newer type of conservation that includes people in the ecosystem and attempts to simultaneously promote development and conservation. One organization in Mongolia that is facilitating the implementation of community-based conservation is the Wildlife Conservation Society. Their goal is:

My research questions concerning this NGO's project are: what are the perceived benefits and problems with CBC? What makes it successful and how can it be improved? My location of study was the easternmost aimags of Mongolia, Dornod and Sukhbaatar. I spent 1 week travelling to 9 of the WCS's 13 active herder communities asking their opinions about the success of CBWC via interviews.

From my data I gathered that there are a few main difficulties. The trend was that community members criticized their leaders for lack of transparency and not sharing information. Moreover, few community members had noticed tangible benefits from the community work, while a higher percentage of leaders indicated that they had seen benefits. The most common benefit mentioned by both members and leaders was education, and the most common issue (bar leadership) was insufficient equipment. A majority (90%) thought there was the possibility for the program to be successful in the future. In conclusion I offer suggestions for NGOs initiating and continuing CBC based on this research.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this research project to the summer 2005 and summer 2008 Taricaya volunteers and staff whose hard work, determination, and unwavering belief in the potential of community-based conservation served to inspire my research.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the following individuals for their valuable contribution to this research project. First, my ISP advisor Ann Winters of the Wildlife Conservation Society in Mongolia for her encouragement and interest in my project, and her help providing information about the Eastern Steppe Living Landscapes Program. My two translators; Sogo who helped me find my way around Choibalsan, and Munguu who cheerfully put up with over a week of bumpy countryside roads, sleeping in vans, and salami and mustard sandwiches, all the while translating even the most difficult interviews. Michael Parks, Fulbright scholar, my travel buddy with a strange fondness for *borts*, and our driver Dondug, for his uncanny ability to locate our interviewees. Also, Kirk Olson, of the WCS and also a fellow Umass alum who helpfully provided me with a majority of my contacts.

I would also like to thank my parents and family who have financially supported my Mongolian adventure and continue to encourage me to pursue my interests, as off-the-beaten-path as they are.

Finally, I would like to thank my interviewees, who took time out of their day to answer the questions of a curious student researcher.

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Introduction

Background Information

"Community-Based Conservation (CBC) is based on the idea that if conservation and development could be simultaneously achieved, then the interests of both could be served" (Berkes 624). It is a newer method of conservation (a few decades old) developed in response to conservation theories that do not take into account the local human element. For example, preservationist theory is that natural resources should be set aside and completely untouched. This is not realistic for most people in the world who depend on natural resources. CBC can also be described as "bottom up" or grassroots conservation. This said, CBC is a very broad category of activities involving ecosystem management and protection. A few possible activities included in CBC are ecotourism, sustainable resource use, education, and law and policy reform. In general the aim of this new type of conservation is to protect the environment as well as benefit locals who depend on it. As members of a New Zealand CBC organization discuss, "People are usually proactive in protecting things of value to them," which is part of the basis for CBC.

Mongolia is particularly a candidate for the potential success of CBC. First of all, there are a wide variety of threats to wildlife and the environment. In the eastern steppe grasslands the threats to wildlife include: poaching for food or illegal trade, and habitat loss due to

mining, fire, overgrazing, desertification, and competition with livestock. Some of the affected animals are gazelles, marmots, foxes, wolves, cranes, and falcons. The second reason CBC has potential for success in Mongolia, is that the local people depend on their environment for their livelihoods, as nomadic pastoralism is practiced by nearly 30% of the population. This combination is ideal for CBC because improvements to the environment will benefit herders, and thus they have an incentive for environmental protection and responsible management.

One NGO that has operated CBC in Mongolia is the Snow Leopard Trust. Internationally recognized for their successful program improving herders' lives while protecting snow leopards and educating Mongolians and foreigners, the Snow Leopard Trust was founded in 1981. Its conservation philosophy is to cooperate with locals via community partnerships and also conduct scientific research to determine the most important areas for snow leopards. By educating locals about the importance of the snow leopard, and offering opportunities for increased income (such as felt handicraft community cooperatives) the snow leopard trust encourages herders to protect the endangered cats. They also have initiated livestock insurance as another way to help herders tolerate the presence of snow leopards in their area.

Another NGO that has recently begun CBC is the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS). The WCS began their community-based conservation project in 2006 with the broad goals, "to develop and implement sustainable and adaptive mechanisms to strategically address threats across the landscape, and to enhance local community capacity." More specifically, their aims were to educate local communities about wildlife and natural resource conservation, have locals record natural resource use, monitor wildlife populations, conserve wildlife habitat, and develop management plans. They originally worked with 27 herder groups, although the number of active communities is currently 13. The WCS, based in Ulaanbaatar, works with the Eastern Mongolia Community Conservation Association (EMCCA), based in Choibalsan, to distribute information to communities. Conservation manager Ann Winters stated that their goal is conservation, but more realistically they are working on sustainable natural resource use. Besides CBC, the WCS has a range of projects running, including research, wildlife trade and hunting prevention, important bird area mapping, and policy reform. Two of their biggest projects are gazelle and saiga antelope research.

Acronyms:

CBC- Community-based conservation

CBWC- Community-based wildlife conservation

WCS- Wildlife Conservation Society

EMCCA- Eastern Mongolia Community Conservation Association

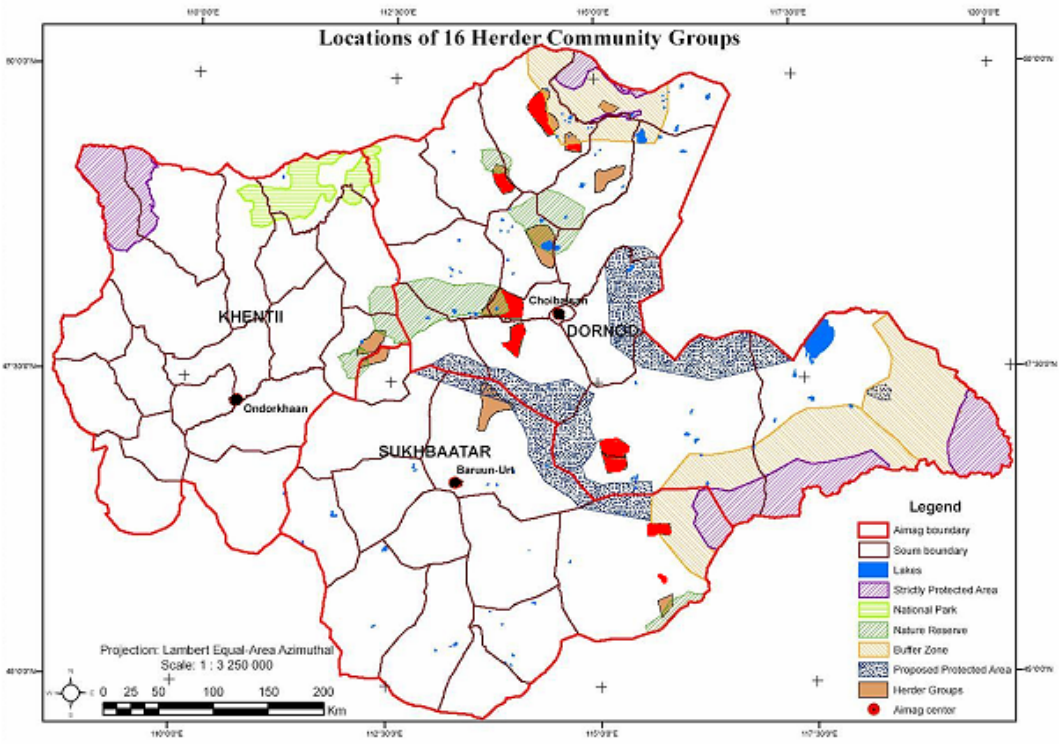
Location of Study

Map 1

I traveled to the eastern part of Mongolia which is a flat expanse of feathery golden grasses and cropped green pastureland known as the steppe. "Steppe" comes from the word "stipa" a species of grass that predominates in the east. The climate of the grassland is dry, with hot summers and freezing winters. The typical wildlife in the area includes Mongolia gazelles, marmots, hares, wolves, foxes, cranes,

water birds, and birds of prey. Of these species, most are threatened by environmental and human pressures.

I set up my base at the Wildlife Conservation Society's apartment in Choibalsan city. Choibalsan is the aimag capital of Dornod. More specifically, I conducted my field research in Sukhbaatar and Dornod aimags of eastern Mongolia. I visited 9 (marked on Map 2 in bright red) of the 13 active herder communities that work with the WCS on their Living Landscapes community-based conservation program. I chose to visit the 9 communities I did based on convenience of travel. Khulsan Shand and Khotont are west of Choibalsan. Chukh, Daguuriin Shines, and Bayan-Ukhaa are north, and Moilt, Zegstei, Bayanburd, and Bayankhangai are south, making it easiest and most logical to visit these communities as loops through their areas.



Map 2

Statement of Intent

"Asking whether community-based conservation works is the wrong question. Sometimes it does, sometimes it does not. Rather it is more important to learn about the conditions under which it does or does not work" (Berkes 624).

My purpose going into this study was to determine the perceived benefits for herders who engaged in community based wildlife conservation (CBWC) in Mongolia's eastern steppe grasslands. I also intended to discover what, if any, issues there were within the communities that prevented the success of CBWC. My second purpose was to produce, based on my data, a list of suggestions and their

rationale for NGOs undertaking community-based conservation projects in eastern Mongolia.

I focused my research on the human side of CBWC for a few reasons. First, since this is a relatively newly implemented program it would be difficult to assess the benefits to wildlife, particularly since the health of wildlife populations depends on more than just herder's activities. Also, one of the main goals of community based conservation (CBC) is to improve the lives of the participants. If this goal is not being met, then CBC cannot be called a success, and that is what I wanted to research.

Research Methodology

Logistics

People:

While planning my trip to the eastern herder communities in Ulaanbaatar I bumped into Michael Parks, a Fulbright scholar planning to write about the grasslands and illegal wildlife trade. We discussed and found that our interview questions and research interests were compatible, and decided to share the costs of visiting the herder communities in Dornod and Sukhbaatar. This worked out very well as we were able to split the high costs of a driver and translator, and also contribute to each others' research by asking different but related questions.

After discussing with Michael Parks, we decided to hire a driver he had worked with before who was also recommended by Kirk Olson. Our driver Dondug worked with Kirk Olson for over 10 years, and knew the roads, and more importantly, many of the people in eastern Mongolia. We decided to use a driver because although more expensive than other forms of transportation (horses, public transportation), it was more reliable and efficient. Considering our time limitations these were deciding factors in our choice of transportation.

We also decided to hire a translator. Michael and I decided that our Mongolian language skills were not sufficient for the types of information we wanted to gather. We hired a Choibalsan local,

Munguu, to accompany us on our field excursions and translate our interviews.

See Appendix for Itinerary and Expenses

Interviews

Why Interviews:

I decided that interviews would be the best way to collect my data because I was looking for qualitative responses and opinions about wildlife conservation and community work. While a survey can be very helpful in generating statistics and chartable data, I felt that only using numbers to describe my informants' opinions would strip the emotional "human" element I wanted to highlight in my research. Therefore, despite the difficulties of presenting and analyzing the information of interviews, I feel that it satisfies my goals more completely than that of surveys. However, I did end up using some of my informants' responses like survey responses to create pie charts. This was for ease in conveying information at a glance, which I then explicated in my analysis.

Who:

When we began our trip looking for the communities and people to interview, I had only a very rough map covering 3 aimags, and a list

of names of the community leaders. Therefore, finding communities often depended on finding the leaders. I ended up interviewing 7 leaders of the 9 communities I visited. The leaders of the two communities I didn't interview were away in the soum centers. Besides the leaders, I tried to interview community members. I found that this was sometimes difficult due to how far apart members of the community lived.

Interview Questions:

Here is the list of interview questions I used. During my interviews I did not necessarily ask every question and I did not go in order. I promoted questions that seemed most relevant to my current informant as the interview progressed.

1) Which NGOs do you work with?

2) What are the advantages/benefits of working with an NGO or working as a community?

3) What are the disadvantages/problems with this community?

4) Do you think the NGO is well organized?

5) Do you think Westerners can help you protect your environment, or should they leave it to Mongolians?

6) What do Westerners know about the animals of the grassland that Mongolians don't?

7) What do Mongolians know about the animals of the grassland that Westerners don't?

8) Do you think the wildlife around here needs protection?

9) What are the benefits of protecting gazelles, marmots, foxes, wolves, and birds, to you personally?

10) Why is it important to you to help protect the wildlife here?

11) Have you seen an improvement in your quality of life since beginning community based conservation? (income, nutrition, education, health?)

12) If yes, how much? In what ways?

13) If not, why don't you think so?

14) What do you use the extra income for?

15) Do you think there is potential for wildlife conservation/protection to benefit you in the future? Do you think this project could be successful?

16) In what ways? How much?

17) Do the NGOs understand what is important to you?

18) Do you have any issues with the NGOs? Are they doing enough?

19) Is the government doing a good job protecting the environment?

20) Is the leader of your community doing a good job?

21) What support should and NGO provide? (tools, training, money?)

22) How is wildlife conservation good for you if it increases competition with your livestock?

23) Why do you think this community is successful, or why is it not working?

A typical interview setting:

Our driver Dondug would pull his Russian van, or furlon, up in front of a house or ger. Someone would come outside and Munguu or Dondug would ask if the family was part of the "nokhorlol" or community, of one of the groups we were looking for. If they said yes, we went inside and crowded around the table or stove as stools were procured. We were then offered *suutei tsai* (milk tea) and *bortzig* (fried dough), *aaruul* (dried milk curds), or *orom* (milk skin) and bread, and sometimes yogurt. We were advised by Munguu to give candies to the mother of the house or to the children. Then, Munguu would introduce Michael and I to our informants. She introduced me as a researcher and student, and Michael as a researcher and writer. Then she would explain the informed consent form before we began the interview. Almost everyone was happy to be interviewed and signed the informed consent form allowing me to audio record the interview and use their responses in this paper and any publications. See the appendix for an example of the informed consent form. During the interview I would usually start with my prepared questions and Michael would jump in with relevant questions as needed. Near the end of the interview Michael would diverge to questions unrelated to conservation about

Mongolian daily life, culture, and cuisine. When we were finished with our questions, we would ask our informants if they had any questions for us. If not, we would wrap up our conversation, thank them for their time, and ask directions to another family or community. These were typical proceedings for interviews with herder community members.

Interviewing Difficulties:

We encountered a few difficulties during the interviewing process. One of the most frequent but of least concern was translating discrepancies. Our translator Munguu was one of the most skilled translators I have worked with. She translated exactly what we said, and did not summarize or put her own spin on things (from what me and Michael could tell). However, there were occasions where we asked for clarification from her about what informants had said. Often this was a lack of clarity on our informants' sides, and not a translating error. However, in any situation where translating takes place some amount of error must be considered due to the inherent differences in languages and the connotations associated with words that may be lost in the translation.

Another difficulty we ran across was interviewees who felt that they did not know enough or were not qualified to talk about the community work. Even when we assured them that their opinion was all we were after, and that it was not a test of their knowledge, this still

ended up being a sticking point. One interviewee was so nervous that we ended the interview prematurely because her discomfort was obvious. Our goal was to gather freely offered opinions, not distress our interviewees. A few times after we had asked questions we passed on them for people who were nervous that they thought they didn't know the "answer" to the question. However, this was only an issue in a few interviews.

One of the more interesting difficulties, and possibly sources of error in my data collection, was the presence of other community members in the same dwelling. This may have influenced our informants' responses. This was particularly noticeable when community leaders were in the same room, as in some cases they would answer for our interviewee, or nudge them about what to respond. This created a source of error for the information I gathered because I could not tell how much the presence of other people was influencing my interviewee. On the other hand, I also had interviews that were supposed to be one family member, but other people would add their two cents. In that case it was like speaking with more than one informant. Therefore, it is difficult to create accurate graphs or charts of responses because there may have been more than one opinion in the same "interview" or the interviewee may have been influenced to repeat the opinion of other people in the room.

The final difficulty with interviews was more one of logistics than interviewing method. We simply did not have enough time to drive to families who lived much further away than the majority of community members *and* visit many different communities. Therefore we decided to sacrifice in-depth community interviewing for collecting a wide sampling from most of the communities across the eastern steppe. See "Suggestions for Further Research" for more about this.

Bias

There are many inherent biases I have that I cannot eliminate completely from my research, only attempt to lessen and acknowledge. First, is that I am a foreigner in Mongolia. Although I have spent over 3 months here soaking up the language and culture, I am still a foreigner. I do not have the insight into some aspects of culture that may be affecting community-based conservation work, although that is what I was trying to learn through my interviews.

In addition to being a foreigner, another source of bias relating to my research is my previous work with community-based conservation in Peru. I spent the summers of 2005 and 2008 working with a group of volunteers at La Reserva Ecológica Taricaya along the Madre de Dios River that focused on wildlife protection and community-based conservation. Therefore I have some expectations and ideas of the issues and benefits of community-based conservation.

From this experience in Peru I am optimistic about the potential for CBC generally, although I hope this does not prevent me from being able to objectively look at the situation in eastern Mongolia.

Besides previous field experience in CBC, my majors of anthropology and biology provide many opportunities for research related to CBC, such as ecotourism, the effects of migration, and environmental concerns. While I would hope that my education prepares me for researching CBC, I can see that it may also affect my perception of it. As with my work experience, I attempt to lessen and acknowledge its effect on my research in Mongolia.

A final possible source of bias is my close association with the Wildlife Conservation Society in Mongolia. My independent study project advisor, Ann Winters, is the Conservation Manager and acting head of the WCS while Amanda Fine is on maternity leave. I also depended on the WCS for my accommodation in Choibalsan and for many contacts they provided me. The WCS is heading the CBWC effort among the communities I visited. Although I depended on the WCS, I maintained my distance from them in interviews because I was trying to get an outsider's look in on CBC. Despite my close association with, and reliance on the WCS, I will attempt to remain as neutral as possible in my analysis of the success of CBWC.

Methodology of Analysis

In my analysis I will look at the most commonly stated benefits and issues. I may insert a few graphs, but that will not be the majority of my analysis because my method of data collection (interviews) does not lend itself to statistical data well. I will attempt to discuss the specific benefits and issues as they relate to different community members, and offer more in-depth discussion for certain opinions. Besides benefits and issues, I will look at the responses to a few specific questions and elucidate what it could mean for conservation efforts in the future. Throughout my analysis I will record my reactions to responses, as this often directed my choice of interview questions. While it may not be the most perfectly objective analysis of data, I will at least attempt to acknowledge my bias whenever necessary.

In addition, I coded my informants with single letters to protect their anonymity.

Research Findings

From the interviews I conducted I created a list of most frequent perceived benefits and issues for community members. I decided to split them into the responses from community members and community leaders, as there seemed to be a trend that community members and leaders had opposing opinions.

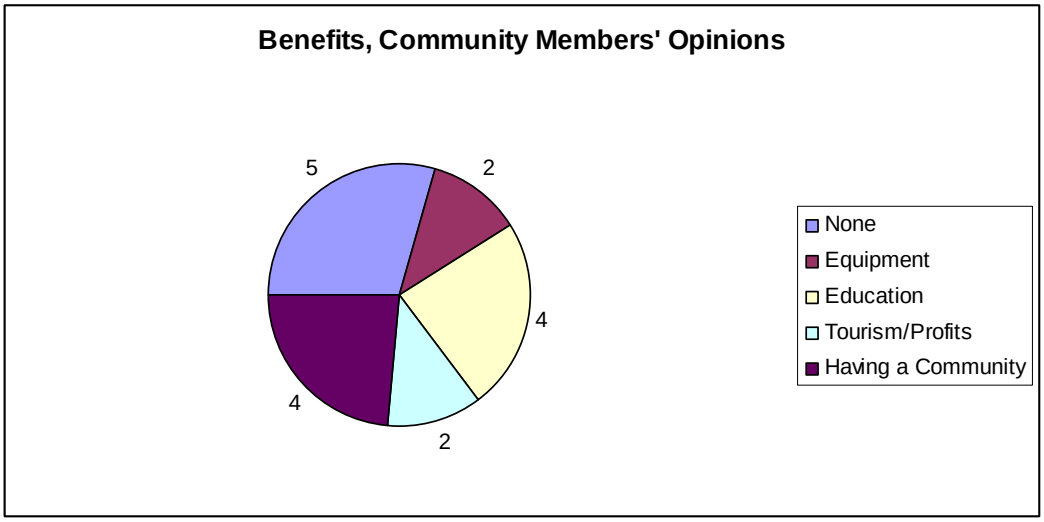


Chart 1

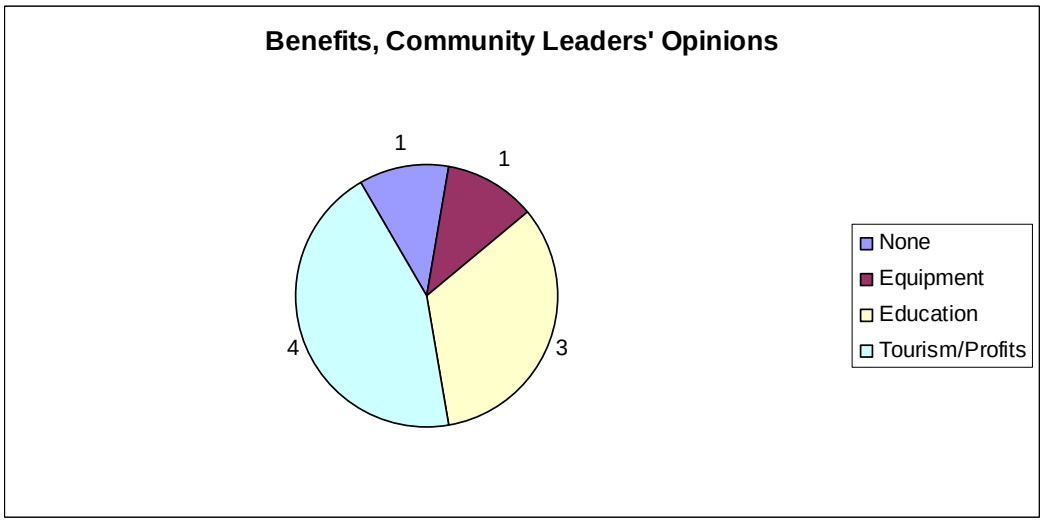


Chart 2

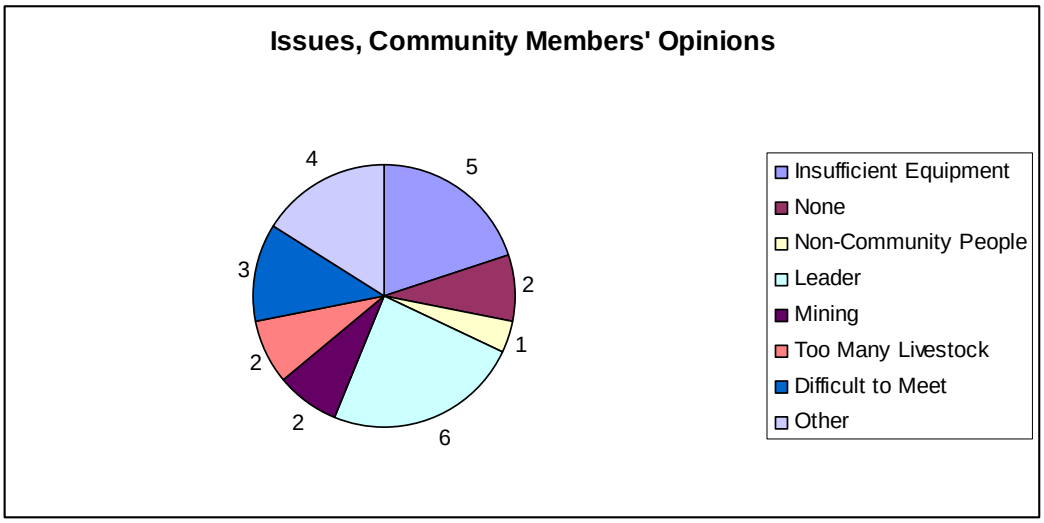


Chart 3

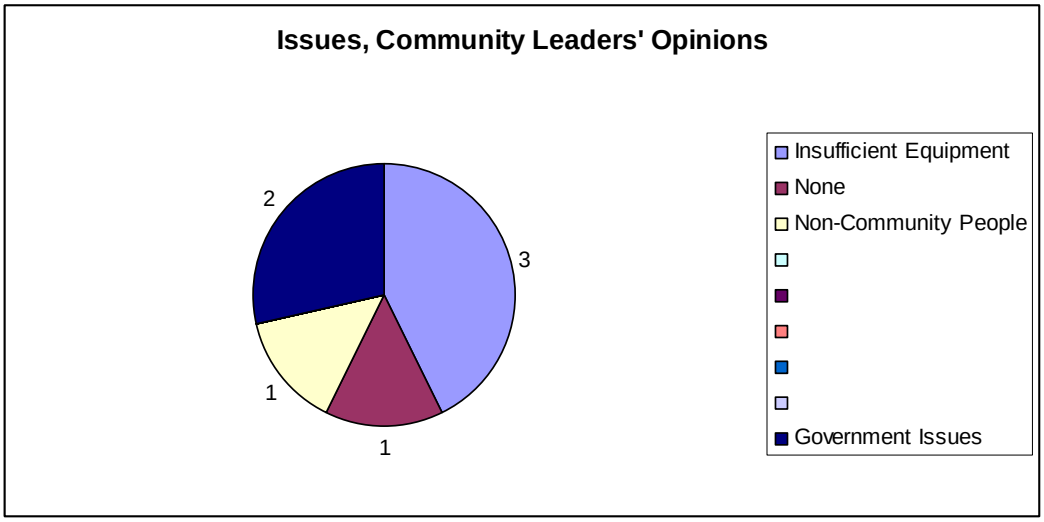


Chart 4

Another question I asked was "is it important to protect the grasslands," and "why is it important". A whopping 100% of interviewees who were asked whether they thought the wildlife and grasslands need to be protected responded that yes, it does. Even families who were not keen on the community work agreed on this point. The reasons people gave for the necessity of protection ranged

from "for its own sake" to "the potential for future profits". One of the most stated reasons for the need to protect wildlife was because there were noticeably fewer animals than there used to be. Also, over 50% of people agreed that wildlife should be protected for its own sake, because nature was unbalanced, or to be able to show their children in the future. Only 2 people remarked about the potential for future profits from wildlife protection.

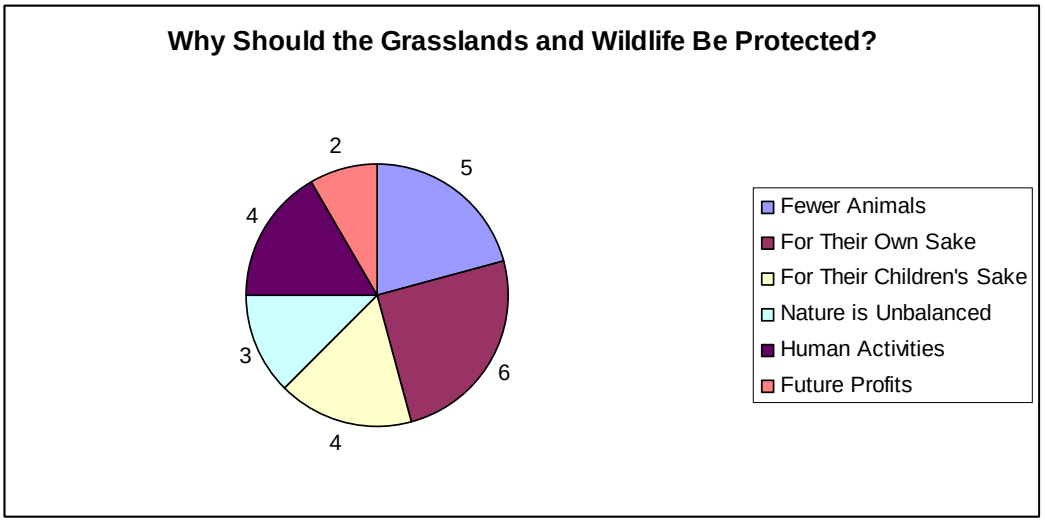


Chart 5

One other question I asked was, despite the current situation and state of the community work, is there potential for this kind of conservation to work in the future?

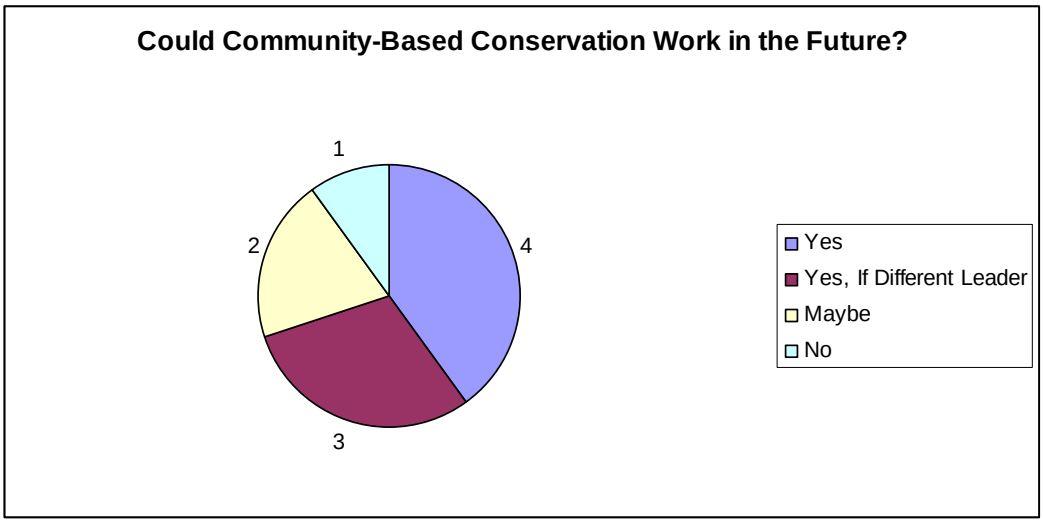


Chart 6

A majority were optimistic about the potential of CBWC. Three people stated that it would be able to work with a new leader. Two people said they were unsure because they had just started, but maybe it could work. One person adamantly insisted that it could not work.

Analysis/Discussion

Observations

When I began my interviews, I did not anticipate the response to many of the questions I prepared. Although I was actively searching for problems preventing the success of CBWC, I imagined that they would have more to do with the NGO/community relations, or feasibility, not intercommunity relations. However, as you can see from Chart 3, the biggest issue among community members was their leaders. After a few informants had expressed this opinion, I added questions to my list that focused on perceptions of community leadership. The reasons for issues with the leader were numerous and varied. They ranged across: the leader not sharing information, poorly managing money, working for his/herself but calling it a community, fabricating information for the NGO, doing tourism projects that were unconnected to conservation projects, and not having enough meetings. Despite the range of criticisms, a few common threads were discernable from the tangle.

First, leaders' transparency and accountability was one of the most important issues for community members. One person, informant P said she thought that the WCS project had given money for equipment and to build a meeting-ger, but this money had not been used, and they had not seen a ger or any benefits from the project. Another interviewee, informant A, stated that a machine used to process milk products had been given to the community, but no one

knew where it was now. A third informant, V, expressed his anger that the community leader kept him on the list of community members, although he had officially left a year ago. He also said that the community leader invented work that the "community" had done to appease the WCS and EMCCA project coordinators.

A more commonly stated complaint was that leaders simply did not share the information they learned at seminars and trainings, and were not working with the community to benefit them. Leaders were criticized if they did not encourage community involvement with the project via information sharing, having meetings, and explaining/sharing benefits. As one interviewee put it, "I want to know, what are the benefits for us?" (Informant V).

Besides the leaders, community members had a few other issues. The next most mentioned problem, which was echoed by the community leaders, was a lack of equipment to do the conservation activities. The necessary equipment ranged from cars for doing wildlife monitoring, to paint for making signs, fences to keep livestock out of lakes, binoculars, and more wells to facilitate mobility. Surprisingly, more of my informants stated the need for equipment than money. Moreover, many people, both community leaders and community members, stated their wish for more education and trainings about conservation and its potential benefits. People seemed keen to find ways to improve their grasslands in a way that would also benefit them

Issues for community leaders were slightly different than those of community members. Besides a lack of equipment, community leaders mentioned having difficulties working with the local government. For example, if they reported a sighting of a poacher to the soum government, often nothing would be done about it. One leader, informant D, said she doesn't feel that she has any power to approach the government and that they ignored her when she reported environmental issues.

Although some of these issues are serious obstacles to the success of community based conservation and its positive perception by locals, my informants also listed a number of benefits. The education provided by trainings and seminars was mentioned by both community members and leaders. Also, community members considered simply being a community to be a benefit. The greatest discrepancy between leaders' and members' responses was when it came to profits or tangible benefits. Only 2/17 members' responses indicated that there were profits or tangible benefits, whereas 4/8 of the leaders' responses indicated that there were profits or tangible benefits. This, combined with community members' issues with leader transparency and accountability suspiciously suggests that individuals, and not entire communities, are benefitting from the community-based conservation work. Here I would like to remind the reader that I am looking at trends across 9 different communities. Some communities had no problems

with their leadership, ran very smoothly, and many members had seen tangible benefits. However, the majority of communities had issues with their leaders.

Beyond the perceived benefits and issues of community-based conservation, I also asked my informants why it is important to them to protect their wildlife. I did not discern any striking differences between the responses of community members and community leaders, so I combined the data into one chart. There were a variety of opinions, but many people said that the wildlife should be protected for its own sake. Almost as many people said that since there are fewer animals, they should be protected, although this does not exactly answer my question. However it does show that there has been a noticeable decrease in wildlife populations. Also, another reason given was that nature should not be unbalanced. One person, informant H, cited a traditional belief that if there are no wolves left, there will be a disaster from the lack of balance in the world. No other people articulated this specific belief, but many people's responses included the necessity of a balanced nature. Two somewhat opposing responses also cropped up in my interviews. People said that wildlife needed to be protected *from* human activities such as poaching, mining, and owning too many livestock, and a few people also said that the wildlife should be protected *for* future human activities, such as tourism, or legal hunting. Finally, nearly 17% of interviewees said they wanted to keep the

wildlife around for their children. As informant G told us, "we don't want our children to ask, what's a marmot, what's a gazelle, and all we can show them is pictures." The responses to this question were relatively evenly distributed, although future profits was the least common response, and preserving wildlife for its own sake was the most common.

The last question I asked from many of my informants was about the potential of CBC in the future. 40% of people said that yes it could or was working, and an additional 30% said they were optimistic it could provide benefits for them and the environment with a different leader in charge. 2 people (20%) said they were unsure if it could work because they had just chosen a new leader, but were optimistic about its potential. Only 1 person who was asked said it could not work, and his reasoning was that there was no community to begin with.

My Analysis

I have discussed the results of my research in terms of perceptions of success and issues for communities. Now I would like to add my own analysis based on trends I've noticed, and hopefully offer some advice for more successful future CBC initiatives.

First of all, from speaking with my informants there seem to be a few very serious issues preventing CBC from working in these communities. The first is that community members are not seeing any

benefits or potential for benefits from this type of work. Personally, I do not think that CBC can be successful if no one has any faith in its ability to better their lives. It would be nice to think that people want to protect their environment for its own sake, even at costs to themselves, yet this is wishful thinking. Since it is more lucrative in the short term for people to poach, overgraze, and abuse water sources, there must be some immediate and tangible benefits of CBC for it to be attractive. This phenomenon of exploitation of un-owned natural resources is known as the "Tragedy of the Commons" and I do not think it can be averted unless there is a tangible way to have an equal or better quality of life. There must be proven benefits for sustainably managing natural resources. This is one of the obstacles to community-based conservation in these herder communities.

Another issue seems to be the leaders of the communities. Although I was skeptical to believe the criticism at first, because it's easier to criticize a leader than to be one, it became a trend across most of the communities I visited. Some of the accusations were very strong and pointed to blatant dishonesty, mismanagement of funds, and the lack of any sort of community except on paper. I also became suspicious when one leader insisted on accompanying us to other community households, and fed lines to my informants. Two communities' members stated that "there was no community" and the leaders only did things on their own, but still called it community work.

A third issue I ran into, which my interviewees did not inform me about but that I picked up on and questioned people about, was how ecotourism projects (such as small resorts) related to conservation. As far as I could tell, the only thing "eco" about these places was that they were located in the countryside. A few community leaders and members, when questioned about the connection to conservation, said that they didn't know of any, or there was none. One interviewee said he thought there used to be a connection, but now he wasn't sure (Informant C). From what I could tell from one of the communities, the profits from the resort would go into the community fund for protecting wildlife.

However, this does not seem like a good way to do community-based conservation because the community development does not depend on the health of the environment. Therefore the community could easily break away from the NGO and ignore conservation once it has developed its ecotourism. For example, ecotourism that depends on bird watching is directly connected to the health and diversity of the bird population. If locals are making money by attracting people to a place to do bird watching, they have a vested interest in protecting birds. In the communities I visited I generally did not see the connection to conservation.

One connection people cited was that they had a volunteer conservationist, and thus as a "conservation community" they were

receiving funds from the NGO for their tourism projects. To me this seems like a disconnected type of community-based conservation where community development and wildlife/grassland protection are not intrinsically linked. Is the NGO separately managing development and conservation projects?

Besides these community and project issues, I am skeptical of the WCS's initial plan to involve 27 communities. Since the beginning of this project over half of them have dropped out of the CBC work. Although this may have been a strategy to identify the best initial communities for this type of work, it seems like the negative effects outweigh the positive. Initially, resources (both time and money) must have been spread thinly. Further along, communities that have stopped doing CBC have lost their faith in its ability to provide any benefits. It will be much more difficult for other organizations hoping to implement CBC to do so. I know this from my experience in the Peruvian rainforest with locals who were so mistrustful of conservation efforts that it took years of dialogue to convince them that they wouldn't be disappointed by our projects. Perhaps one of the biggest issues for the Mongolian model is that community members were asked to donate 30,000 Tugrug to the community fund. Even members of active communities grumbled about how they had not seen any benefits despite this contribution.

As a response to starting with so many communities, perhaps the WCS should follow the advice they give herders about livestock: have

fewer, but have each be more productive. This might also let them build up a few models of successful communities to be able to show potential communities and facilitate new project implementations. Communities wanted to be able to see successful communities and learn from their experiences. Also, from what I observed, different communities had slightly different issues. Some were located near active mines, others were too far apart to meet regularly, and different communities had different goals, such as to protect water resources, wildlife, or pastureland. Therefore focusing on a few communities would allow more in-depth work on their specific issues.

On the other hand, if the selected communities do not flourish, there would not be as much back-up as there is with an abundance of communities. However, and I'm sure the WCS knows this, these projects take time- years usually, to implement and operate at full potential. Discouragement is a real possibility, and thus realistic goals need to be set.

Another difficulty for the NGO must be their distance from the project site, and the chain of command they have to their community members. This WCS project is also funded by the UNDP and USAID, which goes through the WCS office in Ulaanbaatar, which then talks to another NGO, the Eastern Mongolia Community Conservation Association (EMCCA) in Choibalsan, which then coordinates with the community leaders, who are supposed to disseminate information to

community members. This seems like it would be difficult to make sure that each of the links is functioning. From my informants I got the sense that they wanted more contact, support, and encouragement to keep up the CBC work, and they only got this a few times a year during trainings or seminars. People also seemed keen to talk to other communities and share information about their problems and successes.

Despite all these difficulties, and I have focused on them because that was my main research goal, there were definitely some successful community projects operating. I observed a trend for successful projects or communities that included the following: everyone was actively involved and invested in the project, people were well educated about the issues facing the grasslands, people saw benefits or effects of their work, alternate activities to poaching or overusing the grassland were lucrative, the leader shared information, the community worked with more than one NGO.

From my observations it appears that education was one of the key indicators of the success of a community. Members of two of the most seemingly successful communities I visited said their success was due to everyone's understanding of the complex issues facing the environment. These communities understood that the issues were greater than just poaching. They named overgrazing/lack of mobility, mining, drought, too many livestock, as well as poaching as issues for wildlife. One community was able to become more mobile by living in

gers for part of the year, and another community leader expressed her opinion that people should move more often, but due to only having one well they could not.

Other success stories I saw were communities that had improved their income by activities that were not poaching. Based on trainings, some community members had begun to produce various milk products to sell, and some had begun creating felt products. An issue for some community members was that although they had the training, they did not have some of the specific equipment. One community member I interviewed was very proud to say that her relative had won prizes in a milk product contest (informant S). Their community had also begun milking goats, something they hadn't done before. She was optimistic about the potential of goat milk products, and said that their community had made more income since beginning the CBWC project. These success stories were encouraging, although it is difficult to tell whether these activities have replaced any amount of poaching or overgrazing.

Something I observed in communities with successful projects was that the communities often worked with a few different NGOs. This seemed to improve their quality of life and create more active members. Also, since they had more help from different NGOs they seemed better equipped to be able to do CBC. They had more knowledge about working with organizations and the potential benefits

to the community. However, in a few cases communities working with more than just the WCS were less successful. This appeared to be due to the other NGOs, which instead of promoting interdependence of income and environmental protection, were simply giving handouts of livestock. This seems like it would make it very difficult for the WCS to sell its idea of CBC when other NGOs give benefits and ask nothing in return.

Conclusion

As you can see from my research, I identified a number of problems communities were having with CBC, and a number of successes. Therefore to conclude I would like to offer a list of suggestions for NGOs undertaking community based on what I saw was working and what needed improvement.

Summary of issues/successes with suggestions to NGOs doing CBC or CBWC in Mongolia's eastern steppe:

- Build up a few successful community projects first before expanding to other communities
- Don't collect money from participants for a fund initially. When the community and trust is established, it may be possible to do this.
- It is difficult to provide support and communicate with communities from over 800km away in UB. If you want things to get done, you must be there doing them and supporting the communities frequently.
- It takes time to build trust and implement these projects. Set realistic goals and don't promise too much.
- Have a way for community members to change their leaders

- Make sure that everyone in the community feels like they are part of the community and has something to contribute. Listen to everyone, not just the leaders.
- If you want to assess how the project is really going, do not announce when you are going to visit communities.
- Due to most Mongolian people's love of competition, if communities had some friendly competition over project success it might bring out the best in terms of results and enthusiasm.
- Education is key. Communities that understand the complex issues are more likely to do something about it.
- Water resources are a problem for many. Overgrazing, besides too many livestock, is often the result of decreased mobility related to the availability of wells.
- Community-based conservation efforts on the development side of things would be more successful for conservation if they depended on the health of the environment/ecosystem.
- Communities had difficulties working with the local government. They often felt that their concerns were ignored.
- Understanding why herders overgraze, or have too many livestock, or poach is crucial to combating it.
- Many people think it is important to protect wildlife for their children's sake. Use this to promote conservation.

- Keep up the encouragement for communities. More contact and support in the beginning few years is important for building a foundation for the community to be able to manage their resources themselves.
- Consider the possibility that locals may not be the best people to have record and report wildlife impacts due to lack of equipment, time, incentive or training.
- The work of other NGOs in the same communities should be addressed, either as it improves or worsens CBC efforts.
- Emphasize the potential benefits for communities repeatedly, as it is easy to forget when there are few initial benefits.
- Implement projects that have more immediate benefits while also working on long term projects.
- Herders mentioned that communication was difficult, so find ways to facilitated communication/meetings.
- Consider the specific needs of different communities.

I should mention that many of my findings mirror those of the WCS from their "CBWC in Mongolia: Successes and Lessons Learned" workshop in April 2008. From this list of "Main Barriers to Participation" you can see many of the similarities:

- [Physical] distance between herders
- Lack of information
- Lack of trust /internal and external/

- Bad communication between people
- Ethnic group differences /majority and minority etc.
- No financial support
- Communities form, or members join, only because of their economic interest /money from NGO/
- Conflict of interest
- Natural disasters

However, I found more issues with community leaders, and no issues with ethnic group differences. I was frankly surprised by that inclusion, because when Michael asked questions about the differences between Khalkh people and Buryiads, informants mostly mentioned accent and clothing styles. Otherwise, they said, there are few differences. However I did not delve into that area of research relating to CBC. Also, I may have found more about leadership issues because this workshop in 2008 only included 2 community members, both leaders.

Similar to the conclusions of the workshop, I have also concluded that education and information sharing are two of the keys to successful communities. I also found that constantly engaging and supporting communities is important. In fact, many of the "keys to success" identified during this workshop are supported by my research. This suggests that the NGOs understand what is important to communities. I think one of my original findings is the issues community members have with their leaders, as I haven't seen that mentioned before.

My purpose in this study was not to be critical of the NGO doing this work or the people carrying it out. I am truly optimistic about the potential of CBWC. However, I recognize that there are numerous difficulties in realizing its full potential. I am not attempting to criticize people's hard work, just point out the issues. Although many of my findings echoed those of previous research, I hope that this will not prevent people from considering how this strengthens the message of possible problems to be encountered. I also hope that by strengthening that message, my research will eventually produce beneficial changes for the communities I interviewed. As one skeptical informant asked me, "who are you, you are just a student, what can you do to help us?" My response was that, "although I am only a student researcher, I can inform people about your community's issues. While I cannot be your voice, I can try to open the door for discussion about these problems, and advocate for positive changes in the future to make community-based conservation work for everyone. We all have the same goal, to simultaneously protect wildlife and promote community development. There is potential here."

Recommendations for Further Research

I would have benefitted greatly from more time and resources to visit every community and interview a majority of community members. In the future I would recommend focusing on fewer

communities but identifying more fully the key issues for those communities, because each community has different issues and conservation goals. Also I would recommend interviewing inactive communities to see why they became inactive, and to see if the issues in those communities are also present in active communities so they can be prevented or fixed.

Appendix

Itinerary:

May 19th

9:00am- met driver and translator at apartment
9:15am- bought groceries and gas
11:30am- left for Khulsan Shand community
1:45pm- arrived in Khulsan Shand community
3:30pm-left Khulsan Shand community for Khotont community
6:30pm- arrived at Khotont community
8:00pm- returned to Choibalsan

Daily km: ~250

May 20th

9:00am- met driver and translator at apartment
9:15am- bought groceries and gas for a 3 day/2 night trip, changed money, ran errands
11:00am- edited and printed informed consent forms, ran last minute errands
12:00pm- left for northern communities of Chukh, Daguuriin Shines, and Bayan-Ukhaa
1:30pm- lunch break
4:30pm- met one family of the inactive Yakhi community
7:00pm- made dinner in the van
9:00pm- camped in the van

Daily km: ~200

May 21st

8:30am- ate breakfast and packed up
9:00am- left for Chukh community
10:00am- arrived at Chukh community
2:00pm- completed interviews in Chukh, left for Daguuriin Shines
4:00pm- arrived in Daguuriin Shines
7:00pm- completed interviews in Daguuriin Shines
7:15pm- stayed with a family for dinner and overnight

Daily km: ~100

May 22nd

9:00am- left for Bayan-Ukhaa
9:45am- arrived in Bayan-Ukhaa
2:00pm- completed interviews in Bayan-Ukhaa
6:00pm- arrived back in Choibalsan

Daily km: ~150

May 23rd

Spent the day preparing gas, food, and supplies for May 24th, and running errands

Daily km: ~10

May 24th

11:00am- left for southern communities of Moilt, Zegstei, Bayankhangai, and Bayanburd
8:00pm arrived in ____, stayed with a family for dinner and overnight

Daily km: ~350

May 25th

9:00am- left for Moilt
10:30am- arrived in Moilt
11:30am- completed interviews in Moilt, left for Zegstei
1:00pm- arrived in Zegstei
2:30pm- lunch break
4:00pm- completed interviews in Zegstei, left for Bayankhangai
6:30pm- arrived in Bayankhangai
8:30pm- arrived in ____ town

Daily km: ~150

May 26th

9:00am- left for Bayanburd
9:30am- arrived in Bayanburd
11:30am- completed interviews in Bayanburd, left for Choibalsan

Daily km: ~200

Total km: ~1400

Field Expenses:

Driver + gas for 8 days, 1400km ~$420
Food for 4 people for 8 days ~$100
Translator for 8 days ~$200
Transportation to/from research base ~$40
Incidentals ~$25

Total expenses: $785
My share: ~$425

Hello, my name is Alexandra Sprague. I am a student at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and the School for International Training in Mongolia. I study biology and anthropology, and I am very interested in people and the environment. I would like to have a conversation with you about your grasslands. You are not obligated to participate in this conversation and you can stop at any time. Everything you tell me will be kept confidential and anonymous in any publications. I want to use the information to find ways to improve conservation efforts that also benefit communities. Any information you provide could potentially benefit you and your land in the future. Additionally I would ask that you allow me to tape record your voice so that I can remember the details later on.

I consent that the information I provide may be used in the final paper, presentation, and any publications of the thesis work by Alexandra Sprague.

I have read the above and understand its contents and I agree to have a conversation. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older.

I consent to have my voice recorded.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Thank you!

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