MONGOLIA

Mongolia’s sprawling steppes were littered with animal carcasses after the 2009/10 dzud – a summer drought followed by a winter so cold that a quarter of a million livestock and other animals were dying each week. By spring, carcasses were piled next to most of the gers (traditional semi-permanent tents) across half of Mongolia’s provinces.

One third of Mongolia’s 2.6 million people are almost completely dependent on animal herding for their survival. For them, the dzud was catastrophic. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Mongolia, this was the worst dzud in over two decades. A staggering 8.5 million head of livestock (20 per cent of Mongolia’s total livestock reserves) perished.

Mr. Nyam, a 78-year-old herder from Dundgobi Aimag, central Mongolia, is just one of many nomadic herders who are now destitute. “This year we experienced unprecedented cold weather and heavy snow,” he explained. “Last year was extremely dry. We migrated for better pastures, but despite our efforts we had very few livestock left.”

Herders were equally desperate in Zuunbayan-Ulaan soum, a neighbouring district. Mr. Buyanbat, a father of four with a pregnant wife, said: “We lost everything we’ve worked for in the last 15 years.”

Ts Tsetsegbadam, Governor of Sant Soum, estimated that the dzud had claimed some 135,000 animals in her district. “That’s 62.9 per cent of livestock counted at the end of 2009,” she explained.

For herders such as Mr. Buyanbat and Mr. Nyam, the immediate impact was the loss of their only source of income and their primary food supply. To add to their worries, the onset of warm weather meant that thousands of thawing and decomposing animal cadavers threatened to pollute their water and soil.

With a CERF allocation of $1.5 million, Mongolia’s National Emergency Management Agency and UNDP launched a cash-for-work programme, in which herders received financial remuneration for removing animal carcasses. Families received immediate income, and longer-term health and environmental risks were greatly reduced.

Akbar Usmani, UNDP Resident Coordinator a.i. in Mongolia, said: “The programme provided critical funds to meet families’ basic necessities for life. We are supporting herders with less than 250 animals, and female-headed households and the elderly.”

In total, CERF allocated $3.6 million to people affected by the dzud in Mongolia. UNICEF received $964,000 to provide emergency medical supplies, food and fuel. A total of $600,000 was allocated to FAO for emergency livestock inputs; WHO received $226,000 for psychosocial support, medical supplies and communications tools; and $242,000 was allocated to UNFPA for emergency reproductive health support.