

Every day, herder's physical work demands efforts from all body's members. Well activity remains an eloquent example. Prime by hand, finish with a pump. Crouch, straight, leg flexion-extension, mechanical arm tension... the hands weakened by the rope, the face burned by the sun and its permanent reverberation. Through these physical efforts, these working conditions, Gundo collects what he calls "the jewel of the Gobi" by evoking the water of this semi-desert landscape in western Mongolia. This grueling expenditure of energy prompts Gundo, 53 years old, to assert that "dust and wind are not a problem" for comparison purposes. The physical fatigue is felt but he will not express it, the breeze of the wind infuses tenacity. He will only point out that spring season is the most laborious: climatic variations during the day, lack of water, births and wool harvest.

Gundo and his family currently live in Ovoot Tsagaan, a place without river. The proximity well is located 6 km from the camp. It was dug by hand by the hamlet herders in 2012, renovated in 2017 with the financial support of the french NGO, AVSF. Its depth is 10 meters. In the springtime, Gundo repeats this operation every two days. Five families share this well, for a total of 4000 head of livestock. Gundo it has 928. "A rotation takes place but the schedules are hardly respected," he proclaims. This means waiting, in the heat, for the well to partially fill, about 30 minutes. « It completely empties every 1000 heads, then you have to wait 12 hours for it to be full again ». At this season, the whole herd is not driven, only goats and sheep.

By nature, water does not need to be abundant in this biotope. Shrubs and soil retain moisture. But the fact remains unanimous: drought is still being felt this year. "Until May 6 there was no water," Gundo notices. On May 6, it rained the equivalent of "3 fingers", enough for the flora to slowly regrow at the end of that month.

Despite the "pride of being a herder", Gundo wonders about the future of his offspring and "his fear of the future since the murderous dzuds of 2000s". Uncertainty hangs over this herder who invests himself "with his big heart".

- Gobi's jewel. Jinst sum. Bayankhongor aimag. 2020 -