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REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

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Desertification and Land Degradation in North-East Asia

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Desertification and land degradation (DLD) has vast interconnected causes and consequences in all three dimensions of sustainable development. It is estimated that 40% of the world's degraded land is in area of high poverty, approximately 1.5 billion people worldwide with their livelihood depending directly on these degraded land. The Economics of Land Degradation (ELD) initiative estimated that adopting land management practices alone to increase crop production can generate up to USD 1.4 trillion of economic benefits¹. DLD also threatens agricultural productivity to meet the world's growing population and affects the provision of ecosystem services and maintenance of biodiversity. Addressing land degradation is therefore of utmost importance to alleviate poverty, ensure resilience and offer substantial opportunity to generate multiple benefits.

2. North-East Asia, with its vast landmass, geographical and climate variation, together with the differences in stages and choices of development paths, faces a range of land degradation challenges. These include soil erosion, deforestation, overgrazing, pollution and desertification, etc. Each country in the subregion has its own combination of land degradation issues that share some commonalities with each other. Furthermore, DLD has also been threatening the livelihoods of a large number of people residing in areas directly affected by DLD, as well as the even larger populations in the far beyond areas through dust and sandstorms. In China, desertification threatens over 25 percent of landmass (approximately 2.6 million km²) in 18 provinces, affecting more than 400 million people. Mongolia has 77 percent of territory and almost 90 percent of its pastureland under threats of DLD. Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) also faces serious deforestation and land degradation, in particular, a rapid declining of timber forest area at a rate of 480km² per year during the 1990s, which diminished agricultural productivity through water infiltration and soil erosion.

3. In this connection, NEASPEC has supported collaboration of member countries to share information and build policy and technical capacity of Mongolia under the Regional Master Plan for the Prevention and Control of Dust and Sandstorms in North-East Asia developed in 2005. Furthermore, NEASPEC in 2015 started to work with diverse stakeholder groups to develop the North-East Asia Multi-stakeholder Plan (NEAMSP) on Combating Desertification and Land Degradation in order to support more coordinated and efficient actions on DLD. The work on the Multi-stakeholder Plan was further supported by the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2016-2020, endorsed by the 20th Senior Officials Meeting in 2016.

¹ http://www2.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/market_study_final_0_0.pdf

4. Meanwhile, there has been a new process for redefining and expanding the traditional arena of DLD by adopting the goal of land degradation neutrality (LDN) at the 12th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP-12) to the UNCCD in 2015, which defined LDN as *“a state whereby the amount and quality of land resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security remain stable or increase within specified temporal and spatial scales and ecosystems”*. LDN was also recognized as a key approach to combatting DLD in the Sustainable Development Goals, *“By 2030, combat desertification, restore degraded land and soil, including land affected by desertification, drought and floods, and strive to achieve a land degradation-neutral world”* (SDG 15.3). Considering this significance of the new LDN approach, NEASPEC could incorporate it as a key thematic pillar of its DLD works and promote its linkages with other SDGs. By doing so, DLD can be better integrated into subregional and national policies for sustainable development.

II. OVERVIEW OF SUBREGIONAL PROGRESS IN DLD

5. China and the UNCCD launched the Joint Action Initiative (JAI) in 2016 to combat DLD and mitigate the effects of drought² and it is closely linked to the 2030 LDN target. The JAI aims to make the region along the ‘Silk Road’ more environmentally sound and ecological sustainable. The Initiative provides the framework for joint research, technical exchanges, information sharing and demonstration projects. Furthermore, China will host the upcoming thirteen session of UNCCD Conference of the Parties (COP 13) on 4 to 15 September 2017 in Ordos, Inner Mongolia.

6. China has continued to achieve ‘double reduction’ of desertified and sandified area in its three consecutive monitoring period and the national target has been set to remediate 50% of remediable sandified land which implies that 10 million hectares of additional sandified land will have to be remediated. To achieve this national target, LDN and SDGs, a range of related actions have been specified under the latest action plans such as the Thirteen-Five Environmental Protection Plan and China’s National Plan to Implement 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda – Forestry Action Plan, etc. These actions cover a range of key sustainability issues related to forestry, including poverty, equality, sustainable tourism, disaster reduction, climate adaptation etc.

7. Mongolia has formulated an Action Program for 2016-2020 to implement Mongolia’s Sustainable Development Vision 2030. Under the Action Program, DLD has been incorporated in a number of sectors, including the improvement of pasture and reduce DLD in livestock

² <http://www.unccd.int/en/media-center/MediaNews/Pages/highlightdetail.aspx?HighlightID=456>

farming sectors; development measures to reduce soil erosion and degradation of crop land, introduce plant rotation and measures to improve soil fertility; and restore land that has been degraded from mining exploration and exploitation activities.

8. Republic of Korea has developed the 2030 Forest Carbon Management Strategy as a road map for the forestry sector to support reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. ROK will further develop its forestry industry and continue to improve fire and landslide safety of its forests. It has also committed to support global efforts in reducing desertification and regional forestry cooperation.

9. Apart from national initiatives, NEASPEC countries have also continued to work together on a number of joint activities:

10. The Republic of Korea-Mongolia “Greenbelt Plantation Project” is a 10-year tree-planting and desertification halting project which was initiated in 2007 with a USD 9.5 million investment to create 3000 hectares of forest⁸. At its completion in 2017, this project has achieved its goal and planted millions of poplar trees planted throughout the Lun Soum region and the Gobi Desert⁷. There are plans to continue and expand the bilateral project to support Mongolia’s desertification rehabilitation.

11. In February 2016, Mongolia and China agreed to collaborate in combating desertification and sandstorms, and continue their experience-sharing. China will support a USD 570,000 project along the Chinese-Mongolian border for monitoring and evaluation of desertification as well as dust and sandstorms³.

III. STUDY ON NORTH-EAST ASIA LAND DEGRADATION NEUTRALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

12. To achieve a state of no net loss of healthy and productive land, the LDN approach aims to (a) encourage the development an optimal mix of measures designed to avoid, reduce and/or reverse land degradation, and (b) balance anticipated losses in land-based natural capital and associated ecosystem functions and services with land restoration and sustainable land management that produce alternative gains.⁴

13. With the adoption of the land degradation neutrality target, all countries are requested to formulate voluntary targets to achieve LDN according to their specific national circumstances

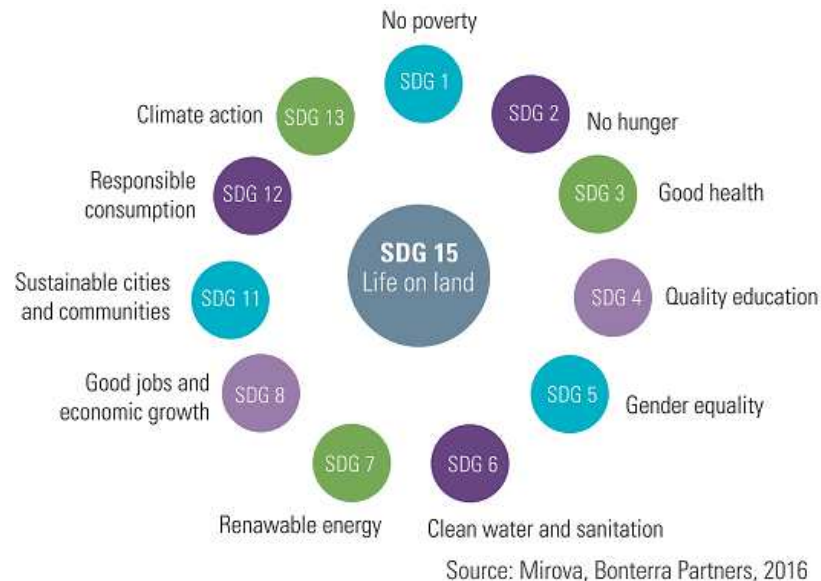
³ <http://mad-intelligence.com/mongolia-and-china-to-unite-efforts-against-desertification/>, Mongolia and China to unite efforts against desertification

⁴ UNCCD, 2016. Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality at the country level: Building blocks for LDN target setting

and development priorities. Among NEASPEC member countries, China and the Russian Federation are currently participating in the voluntary Degradation Neutrality Target Setting Programme.

14. Moreover, the approach and scope of actions towards LDN has significantly changed and expanded. With the new global commitments on LDN, its incorporation in the SDGs, and the interlinkages and multiple benefits, a much broader and strategic understanding is needed to unlock the potential of LDN as a solution to promote SDG 15 as well as other SDGs.

Figure 1 SDG 15 (including LDN) and its linkages with other SDGs



15. For example, LDN provides significant benefits in terms of mitigation and adaptation to climate change by increasing carbon stocks in soils and vegetation and strengthening the resilience of ecosystem and its rural communities against extreme climate events. Some potentials of these links between land and climate were reflected in the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) submitted by countries to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as follows.

- China: Increase forest carbon stock volume by 4.5 billion cubic meters from 2005 levels by 2030.
- DPRK: Introduce advanced technologies for afforestation, reforestation, and sustainable forest management including agroforestry

- Japan: Remove 37 million t-CO₂ (2.6% reduction of total emissions in 2013) with forest carbon sinks measures (27.8 million t-CO₂) and other measures
- Mongolia: Reduce carbon emissions from deforestation and forest degradation by 2% by 2020 and 5% by 2030
- ROK: Improve the capacity of carbon sinks by replacing tree species and expanding forested areas
- Russian Federation: Rational use, protection, maintenance and forest reproduction of forests to support limiting GHG emissions to 70-75% of 1990 levels by the year 2030.

16. LDN can be both a problem and a tool to sustainability, as pointed out in a recent UNCCD report on the emerging market of LDN⁵. It is suggested that this new way of thinking offers new opportunities for *“using land management as a tool to address other challenges such as biodiversity, climate, food security, poverty, water availability”*. A subregional study is therefore proposed to review comprehensive picture of the LDN challenge in the subregion, and its linkages and potential contribution to SDGs, generate knowledge of the current status, share cases and discuss the way forward in achieving LDN as well as overall SDGs.

17. The objectives of the study are to: (i) strengthen knowledge and understanding of LDN in the subregion both as a problem and a solution; (ii) identify key opportunities of inter-sectoral and international collaboration in bringing multiple benefits through LDN; (iii) share experiences and lessons learnt in LDN-related challenges within and beyond the subregion.

18. The objectives are to be achieved through the following components of the Study:

- Subregional review** on the overall status of LDN; plans and progress towards international goals and commitments; and multi-level subregional cooperation
- Country study** on national progress, context and priorities, current status of land degradation and plans, which also includes case studies on LDN either as a problem or a solution to wider sustainability challenges (its linkages with biodiversity, climate vulnerability, poverty etc.)
- Expert Consultations** on the draft report and overall recommendations, which will identify key linkages of LDN and SDGs in each country and the subregion as a whole, as well as opportunities of collaboration and follow-up actions.

19. The on-going Northeast Asia Multi-Stakeholder Plan (NEAMSP), which collects and shares information on stakeholders’ plans and programmes, will provide input and enhance

⁵ UNCCD and Mirova, 2016. Unlocking the Market for Land Degradation Neutrality

comprehensiveness of the Study, in particular, with information of actions taken by non-state stakeholders.

IV. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

20. The Meeting may wish to request member States to provide their views on the proposed Study and invite member States to encourage national institutions to participate and share information.

21. The Meeting may wish to request member States to recommend national experts who can contribute to the development of the study plan, and provide national inputs.

22. The Meeting may wish to invite the Government of China to advise NEASPEC Secretariat and member States on potential contributions to UNCCD COP-13 to be held in September 2017 in Ordos, Inner Mongolia.

23. The Meeting may wish to invite member States to indicate their intended contributions to the development and implementation of joint activities in the field of desertification and land degradation.

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