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REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

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Implementing the Regional Master Plan for the Prevention and Control of Dust and Sandstorms in North-East Asia

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

1. “The Regional Master Plan for the Prevention and Control of Dust and Sandstorms (DSS) in North-East Asia”¹ was jointly developed in 2005 by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) and United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and adopted by the governments of China, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea and Japan to address DSS in a comprehensive manner through prevention and monitoring at the subregional level.
2. Following the Master Plan, the Secretariat has consulted with NEASPEC member States and international agencies, including UNEP, UNCCD, UNDP and ADB, to develop a demonstration project focusing on the prevention of dust and sandstorms at source areas.
3. Following the discussions and decisions of SOM-14 and SOM-15, the project titled “Implementing the Regional Master Plan for the Prevention and Control of Dust and Sandstorms in North-East Asia” was launched in the second half of 2010.
4. The project directly responds to the Regional Master Plan by piloting one of its proposed transboundary DSS prevention areas² in Zamyn-Uud, Dornogobi Aymag of Mongolia bordering with Erenhot, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region of China. In this regard, the success of policies and technical measures of China on combating desertification and land degradation in the recent decades provided Mongolia with useful and practical lessons.
5. The project focuses on i) implementing a demonstration project through simple irrigation system and irrigated natural wind- and sand-breaks, and self-financing mechanism; and ii) sharing subregional experience on best practice in learning and capacity development. In addition, the project aims to strengthen cooperation among local, regional and central level authorities in Mongolia and China on activities related to combating desertification to boost the effect of their national and joint actions. Through the process, the project aims to support the implementation of the Mongolian National Action Programme for Combating Desertification (NAP) 2010-2020 which sets up an overall strategy for combating desertification in the country and aims to improve coordination of actions in this regard among governmental and non-governmental entities. The main objective of the Programme is to prevent, cope with and reverse desertification and land

¹ The Master Plan provides a guide for regional collaborative activities to reduce DSS in North-East Asia. It consists of two independent but interrelated components, namely Component I: Establishment of a regional monitoring and early warning network for DSS in North-East Asia and Component II: An investment strategy for the prevention and control of DSS through demonstration projects with the former conducted by UNEP and ADB and the latter implemented under the guidance and supervision of ESCAP and UNCCD.

² The four focus areas of the China are all located in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region namely, Hulunbuir, Xilingol, Ordos, and Alashan. The four areas in Mongolia are Sukhbaatar, Omnogobi, Dornogobi, and Ovorhangai.

degradation in Mongolia, ensuring environmental sustainability, improving livelihoods of the rural population and generating environmental services of global importance.

6. During SOM-16 held in September 2011, the Meeting reviewed the intermediate project results including outcomes of consultations with national focal points in China and Mongolia, and the detailed plan formulated by the Inception Meeting held in Ulaanbaatar and Zamyn-Uud, Mongolia in April 2011. The Meeting also noted the project's contribution to supporting local communities, facilitating bilateral and multilateral cooperation and complementing national initiatives including Mongolian Greenbelt project. Moreover, the Meeting supported the plans of major project activities scheduled for 2011-2012.

II. OVERVIEW OF PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

7. Subsequent to the SOM-16, the NEASPEC Capacity Building Training Programme for Mongolian Experts was held in Erenhot, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China on 19-26 September 2011 by the Institute of Desertification Studies (Chinese Academy of Forestry), Forestry Department of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, and People's Government of Erenhot Municipality with support of ESCAP and the National Bureau to Combat Desertification of China. The training was attended by 42 participants including high level officials, scientists and experts from Chinese government, research institutes, universities and 19 trainees from Mongolia. Thematic presentations and discussions were delivered on the themes of laws and regulations, strategies and policies, technologies and best practices on combating desertification in China. A one-day field trip was also organized. The report of the training programme is attached in Annex I in this document.

8. The Secretariat facilitated the preparation of two review papers by national consultants from China and Mongolia. The Chinese paper prepared in collaboration with experts from the Cold and Arid Regions Environmental and Engineering Research Institute and NBCD, contains a comprehensive study on successful practices of combating desertification and prevention of dust and sandstorms in China with a particular focus on useful practices for the North-East Asian subregion. Specifically, the study analyzes successful policy measures applied in China on institutional, managerial, strategically and legal levels and provides an overview on successful technical and structural measures applied in China to combat desertification. The Mongolian review paper assesses the socioeconomic conditions leading to forest and soil degradation, proposing potential agricultural and horticultural practices for sustainable livelihood of local communities and sustainable land management, and outlining possible self-financing and fund allocation mechanisms to ensure sustainability of ongoing and future field projects to combat desertification. The two review papers are compiled together as Annex II in this document, a summary to which is as follows in paragraphs 9-11.

9. China, since the early 1950s, faced more than 70 severe dust and sandstorms which have incurred great economic losses and severely affected the living conditions in north central plain and north-east China. In Mongolia, the effects of climate change have shown

in the increasing average temperature and the decreasing precipitation during the heavy rain season. Agriculture and mining industries are both inherently high in their tendency to exacerbate land degradation. But there are also the key economic activities for Mongolia. Overgrazing of livestock and strip mining are contributing to severe dust and sandstorms.

10. Existing policy mechanisms in China have largely shifted from a government-led approach to a more inclusive one. Legal mechanisms and institutional arrangements were fortified to combat desertification as part of the National Socio-Economic Development Plan, which is being complemented by innovative policies and projects that provide preferential tax incentives, discounted loans, etc. In Mongolia, both Land Law and Mining Law are being improved in order to apply more effective approaches such as traditional rotational grazing.

11. Reflection on practical lessons concludes that an integrated strategy needs to be implemented, considering the natural environment in the context of development of local communities and their economies. Second, all stakeholders need to be motivated and well informed of the most up-to-date technologies and best practices. In this connection, the technical assets need to be well incorporated into the ecological restoration efforts, which can be strengthened by research activities. Mongolia suggests that while the capacity building among herders and other cooperatives are essential, self-financing mechanisms are the key to maintaining sustainable efforts against desertification.

12. To further strengthen subregional cooperation and raise international attention to issues of desertification in North-East Asia, the Secretariat organized a side-event at the 10th Conference of Parties (COP-10) to UNCCD held in Changwon, Republic of Korea on 11 October 2011. This event titled “Subregional Cooperation on Combating Desertification and Land Degradation in North-East Asia” was attended by more than 50 participants representing governmental entities, research institutions, civil society organizations, international and UN agencies from more than 10 countries in Asia-Pacific and Europe, including prominent speakers from China, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea. The participants discussed the advantages of pursuing multilateral cooperation in coping with such a complex challenge as desertification and outlined some areas for further cooperation within the subregion and wider in Asia-Pacific, as well as identified areas of cooperation with other global actors.

13. The implementation of the pilot project on tree planting in Zamyn-Uud was conducted in 2011 and 2012. As a result, more than 12,500 trees were planted in various locations inside the city and on the city outskirts to prevent sand encroachment into the city. The planting exercise was moderately successful due to lack of experience of and expertise in the local implementing agencies and inadequate provision of water for irrigation of the plantation. In particular, concerning the death of the trees in main area, the Government of Zamyn-uud purchased additional trees with its own budget and replanted in October 2012. Also, the local government with its own budget increased the fenced area and developed a new well for irrigation.

14. In order to increase awareness of local population, especially schoolchildren, two easy to follow, attractive books in color with a print run of 6,000 copies were printed. These books contained material on environmental education, specifically on the issues of combating desertification and were distributed in schools in Zamyn-uud.

15. The project also developed a GIS-based information system for activities and projects on desertification, land degradation and droughts (DLDD) in Mongolia. It was designed as a new part of the existing National Environmental Information database and includes information of ongoing and completed DLDD projects across the country in both Mongolian and English. The database would support NCCD for better coordination of future activities on combating DLDD in Mongolia. The GIS-based database is available on following web-pages:

- www.mne.gov.mn (Ministry of Green Development and Environment of Mongolia)
- <http://geodata.mne-ngic.mn/>

16. Main components of the GIS-based information system include:

- Substantive (project name, description, donor, budget, scope) and spatial (GPS coordinated) information on main projects on combating desertification, land degradation and droughts (DLDD) in Mongolia (8 main projects included)
- Integration into a GIS software system (ArcGIS software) for better visualization, analysis and mapping of the existing projects on DLDD conducted by various projects in Mongolia

17. During the project review meeting held on 4 September 2012, the key Chinese and Mongolian experts from national focal points exchanged ideas and views on main challenges encountered in the project and its main accomplishments. It was agreed that as the field projects require considerable human and financial resources, the work under NEASPEC on combating desertification should focus on training and capacity building activities. It was also underlined that the main accomplishments of the project were building close relationships between Chinese and Mongolian authorities and experts responsible for desertification issues on national, provincial and local levels and advancing subregional agenda on regional and global levels. In addition, the Mongolian experts stressed the usefulness of the training programme that was held in September 2011 in Erenhot. Moreover, the project considerably contributed to mobilizing the interest of potential donors in implementation of the Regional Master Plan.

18. As a result of the review meeting, the experts proposed to focus the future activities on training and capacity building of NEASPEC on the following areas:

- Long-term academic and research exchanges, including a potential scholarship programme
- Technical training programmes on monitoring and assessment of desertification and land degradation

- Exchange of experience and knowledge with other regions through international workshops

19. The following topics were also identified as priorities for subregional, multi-/bilateral cooperation with financial and technical support from other member States and donors :

- Integrated management of grassland/pastoral area
- Sand control technology to protect railways and roads
- Reclamation of land used for mining operations
- Awareness raising for the public
- Research on water and soil quality in desert and steppe areas
- Development and deployment of measures and technologies for combating desertification
- Establishing of International Desertification Study Center in Steppe and Desert areas

20. In this regard, as presented in Annex III, the Mongolian National Committee to Combat Desertification has prepared a proposal of follow-up activities for the review and decision by the SOM-17.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

21. The Meeting may wish to express its views and comments on the overall implementation of the project and the wider dissemination of the project results.

22. The Meeting may wish to discuss and decide on the approaches and plans of future activities of NEASPEC in the field of mitigation of dust and sandstorms in North-East Asia and request the member States to provide financial and technical support for the identified activities.

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