

Concept Note
Side Event at UNCCD COP17
From Commitments to Action:
Strengthening Transboundary Cooperation for Sand and Dust Storms
in North-East Asia

25 August 2026 (13:00-14:30)

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

Sand and Dust Storms (SDS) are an escalating transboundary challenge in North-East Asia, driven by climate change, desertification, and land degradation. Moving across international borders, SDS directly impact downwind countries, threatening public health, rural livelihoods, and regional efforts to achieve Land Degradation Neutrality (LDN). Recurrent events affecting cities such as Ulaanbaatar, Beijing, Seoul and Tokyo underline the transboundary nature of SDS and the urgent need for joint, coordinated responses.

The impacts of SDS are deeply regressive. Vulnerable groups – particularly children, women, and the elderly in rapidly aging rural societies – face disproportionate exposure to these atmospheric hazards. These communities often lack adequate access to early warning systems, healthcare, and social protection, turning SDS into a critical issue of social equity and demographic resilience.

In May 2024, the leaders of China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK), at the Trilateral Summit, reaffirmed that through the ‘Trilateral+X Cooperation’ framework, the three countries will collaborate with Mongolia on reducing dust and sandstorms in East Asia, with the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) serving as a key coordination mechanism.

In alignment with this commitment, ESCAP is implementing the Regional Plan of Action on Sand and Dust Storms in Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP/78/12/Add.1) and, together with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), co-chairs the UN Coalition on Combating SDS, contributing to the planning of the UN Decade on SDS (2025–2034). Building on a joint SDS event organized by ESCAP, TCS and Mongolia at the 82nd Session of ESCAP in April 2026, and responding to the call for a concrete, action-oriented regional initiative beyond impact assessment and early warning, Mongolia has requested ESCAP’s support in the lead-up to UNCCD COP17, including thematic-day leadership and regional SDS

programming. This provides a timely opportunity to frame an ESCAP-TCS collaboration that supports Mongolia while advancing the broader Trilateral + Mongolia cooperation agenda.

Translating these high-level "Commitments to Action," this side event at UNCCD COP17 marks a pivotal transition from political discourse to functional synergies by officially launching the Mongolia-TCS-ESCAP Joint Initiative on Addressing SDS in North-East Asia. Guided by the strategic "Trilateral Plus X" framework with Mongolia as a key partner, this event focuses on operationalizing regional resilience. By strengthening Mongolia-TCS-ESCAP collaboration, this joint initiative bridges cross-border policy coordination with tangible, on-the-ground mitigation and preparedness, serving as a vital regional public good to ensure that no one is left behind.

Objectives

To strengthen Mongolia's technical, institutional, and community capacities to mitigate, monitor, and respond to SDS through enhanced collaboration, leveraging regional expertise and partnerships with China, Japan, and the ROK, among others. Aligned with the Regional Plan of Action on SDS, the side event aims to foster practical collaboration in North-East Asia through the Joint Initiative focused on:

- (i) **Integrated Forecasting:** Enhancing impact-based forecasting and multi-hazard early warning systems;
- (ii) **Applied Risk Assessment:** Advancing SDS risk assessment, transboundary studies, and sector-specific impact analyses;
- (iii) **Community-Level Preparedness:** Strengthening community-level and municipal preparedness and resilience to SDS impacts; and
- (iv) **Regional Coordination:** Facilitating regional coordination, knowledge-sharing platforms, and sustained high-level engagement.

Expected Outcomes

- **Formalized Commitments:** Strengthened partnerships and formalized institutional commitment to systematically address SDS in North-East Asia through the launch of the Joint Initiative.
- **Solidified Regional Cooperation:** Concrete demonstration of the operationalization of the partnership established through the ESCAP-TCS collaboration.
- **Actionable Land Governance Frameworks:** Identification of practical and synergistic projects linking ecological restoration in source areas with downwind mitigation measures, technology transfer, and joint monitoring networks.

Programme (90 mins)

Time	Agenda
13:00-13:20 (20 minutes)	Opening Session - Remarks by H.E. <i>Sandagochir Tsend</i>, Minister of Environment and Climate Change - Remarks by H.E. <i>Armida Salsiah Alisjahbana</i>, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Secretary of ESCAP - Remarks by H.E. <i>Lee, Hee-Sup</i>, Secretary General, Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat
13:20-13:35 (15 minutes)	Launching of the Joint SDS Initiative Launching of the Collaborative Initiative of Mongolia, TCS and ESCAP in Addressing Sand and Dust Storms Introduction of the Initiative: <i>Ms. Letizia Rossano</i>, Director, Asian and Pacific Centre for the Development of Disaster Information Management
13:35-14:25 (50 minutes)	Panel Discussion on Regional Cooperation on SDS in North-East Asia <i>Moderator</i> <i>Mr. Battulga Erkhembayar</i>, Director General of the National Agency for Meteorology and Environmental Monitoring (NAMEM), and Permanent Representative of Mongolia to the World Meteorological Organization <i>Keynote</i> (7-8 minutes) <i>Mr. Gombolhuudev Purevjav</i>, Scientific Secretary of the Information and Research Institute of Meteorology, Hydrology and Environment (IRIMHE), National Agency for Meteorology and Environmental Monitoring (NAMEM), Mongolia <i>Panelists</i> (6-7 minutes each) <i>Mr. GAO Guanglei</i>, Professor and Doctoral Supervisor at Beijing Forestry University & Deputy Director of the General Office of the China-Mongolia Cooperative Center for Combating Desertification (Beijing Center) <i>Mr. KUROSAKI Yasunori</i>, Professor, International Platform for Dryland Research and Education / Arid Land Research Center, Tottori University <i>Ms. YUN Eunju</i>, Director, Environmental Safety Division, Incheon Metropolitan City, Republic of Korea <i>Mr. Daniel Tong</i>, Professor at George Mason University and Chair of the Global Steering Committee of World Meteorological Organization (WMO) Sand and Dust Storm Warning Advisory and Assessment System (SDS WAS) <i>Mr. Animesh Kumar</i>, Head, the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR) Office in Bonn Q&A
14:25-14:30 (5 minutes)	CLOSING