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Moscow, Russian Federation

REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Item 5 (c) of the provisional agenda)

Desertification and Land Degradation

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Member States at SOM-28 adopted the NEASPEC Strategic Plan 2026-2030, which identifies desertification and land degradation (DLD) as one of the five thematic priorities of NEASPEC, and requested the secretariat to also reflect droughts and sand and dust storms (SDS) in the work programme while avoiding duplication of efforts and expanding partnerships. Under the Strategic Plan, the DLD programme aims to strengthen regional mechanisms for collaboration among member States and enhance their capacity to assess, monitor and manage DLD.

2. DLD continues to pose significant challenges to sustainable development in North-East Asia, affecting land productivity, ecosystems, livelihoods, water security and economic resilience. These changes are driven by a combination of climatic and human factors, including shifts in precipitation patterns and temperature, drought, livestock grazing, water withdrawals, mining and other land-use pressures. These drivers demonstrate the close interlinkages among land degradation, climate change, biodiversity loss and sand and dust storms, highlighting the need for more coordinated responses.

II. PROGRESS IN IMPLEMENTING THE 2026 ACTIVITY PLAN

Knowledge production: Research and policy advice

3. Building on prior consultations, at SOM-28, member States approved the preparation of a study on the main causes, drivers, and impacts of desertification and land degradation in North-East Asia in 2026. Drawing upon the Secretariat's earlier stocktaking and analytical work, the study is intended to provide an evidence base for future policy dialogue and regional cooperation, examining how climate change, land-use practices, and water-resource management interact in driving or mitigating DLD. It also reviews relevant national and regional policies and strategies, identifies gaps and interlinkages, and develops actionable recommendations for strengthening regional cooperation.

4. The secretariat initially contracted a consultant to prepare the paper. A draft annotated outline was subsequently prepared and circulated to Member States for review

and guidance. The outline was revised based on the comments received and provided the agreed basis for developing the full paper.

5. However, as the original consultant was unable to continue the assignment, the Secretariat subsequently engaged two new consultants in September 2026 to resume the work and develop the full paper based on the annotated outline previously reviewed by Member States.

6. The first full draft of the study is expected to be completed in November 2026. Following an internal review, the draft will be circulated to Member States for comments and guidance, with publication envisaged by the end of the first half of 2027.

Knowledge sharing: Partnership

7. The secretariat organized a side event at the 17th session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), entitled "*From Commitments to Action: Strengthening Transboundary Cooperation for Sand and Dust Storms in North-East Asia,*" on 25 August 2026 in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, while also contributing to related side events convened by the DLDD-NEAN secretariat on 25 August, and Hanns Seidel Foundation Korea on 26 August, and by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) on 27 August.

8. Jointly organized with the Government of Mongolia and the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), the event responded to the growing transboundary impacts of sand and dust storms, officially launching **the Mongolia-TCS-ESCAP Joint Initiative on Addressing Sand and Dust Storms in North-East Asia**. The Joint Initiative seeks to translate regional commitments into practical cooperation in the following areas:

(a) **Integrated Forecasting:** Enhancing impact-based forecasting and multi-hazard early warning systems;
(b) **Applied Risk Assessment**: Advancing SDS risk assessment, transboundary studies, and sector-specific impact analyses;
(c) **Community-Level Preparedness:** Strengthening community-level and municipal preparedness and resilience to SDS impacts; and

(d) **Regional Coordination:** Facilitating regional coordination, knowledge-sharing platforms, and sustained high-level engagement.

Knowledge dissemination: Outreach activities

9. In line with the guidance of the member States, the secretariat also organized the side event entitled "*Leaving No One Behind in a Dusty World: Regional Cooperation on Sand and Dust Storms for All Ages*" on 23 April 2026 in Bangkok, Thailand, during the 82nd session of ESCAP. Jointly organized with the Government of Mongolia and TCS, the event brought together government representatives, regional organizations and experts to discuss how strengthened regional cooperation on sand and dust storms could contribute to inclusive and resilient societies. Discussions highlighted the disproportionate impacts of sand and dust storms on vulnerable groups and the need to strengthen monitoring, early warning, preparedness and policy coordination.

III. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR 2027

11. The proposed Activity Plan for Desertification and Land Degradation in 2027 is contained in Annex II. The plan will build on the analytical and partnership work undertaken in 2026 and focus on translating the findings of the DLD Policy Paper and the objectives of the Joint SDS Initiative into policy dialogue and practical regional cooperation.

12. Following the planned publication of the DLD Policy Paper in the first half of 2027, the secretariat proposes to convene an expert consultation meeting to review its key findings and recommendations and identify appropriate follow-up activities. The meeting will bring together representatives of member States, experts, and relevant partner organizations.

13. The secretariat also proposes to organize a regional workshop in support of the Mongolia-TCS-ESCAP Joint Initiative on Addressing Sand and Dust Storms in North-East Asia. The workshop will facilitate the exchange of national experiences, review shared needs and priorities, and discuss practical activities.

IV. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

14. The Meeting may wish to request member States to:

(a) Take note of the progress made in implementing the 2026 Activity Plan for Desertification and Land Degradation, including Sand and Dust Storms; and

(b) Review and approve the proposed activity plan for 2027, contained in Annex I.

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