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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. Deforestation, overgrazing, and the expansion of agriculture, industrial and urban areas continue to be the most significant direct causes of desertification and land degradation (DLD), which is both a cause and a result of poverty. The current management practices in the land-use sector contributes to about 25 per cent of the global greenhouse gases and exposes millions of people to climate stress and thus excluded from wider infrastructure and economic development. The Global Land Outlook launched at the 13th Session of the Conference of the Parties (COP13) to the United National Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) in 2017 in Ordos, China¹ revealed that the pressures on global land resources are greater than at any other time in human history. That is more than 1.3 billion people are trapped on degrading agricultural land and facing drastically increasing competition for crucial ecosystem services such as food, water and energy.

2. Following to the mega trend of rural transformation and urbanization at unprecedented speed and scale in recent decades, the loss of between 1.6 and 3.3 million hectares of prime agricultural land per year in 2000 and 2030 is projected. The expansion of cities and connected infrastructure development have both direct and indirect impacts on land, such as replacing natural ecosystems and sealing soils thus increasing the risks of flooding. Therefore, more efficient land-use planning, enhancing the adaptive capacity of communities and ecosystems through a mix of conservation, sustainable management, and restoration of land resources are essential to reverse the trends of degraded land productivity. For example, restoring the soils of degraded ecosystems has the potential to store up to 3 billion tons of carbon annually².

3. Land degradation neutrality (LDN), as a scientific conceptual framework endorsed at UNCCD COP13, is linked with emerging issues such as drought, sand storms and migration and is defined as “a state whereby the amount and quantity of land resources necessary to support ecosystem functions and services and enhance food security remain stable or increase within the specified temporal and spatial scale and ecosystem”. In other word, “no net loss” of healthy and productive land through reaching a level balance between new degradation and reversed post degradation applied to all land uses (agriculture, forestry, protected areas, land occupied by human settlements and infrastructure) and all land degradation. As of September 2018, 119

¹ https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/documents/2017-09/GLO_Full_Report_low_res.pdf

² <https://www.unccd.int/issues/land-and-climate-change>

countries have committed to set voluntary LDN targets in accordance to the baseline of each country³ under UNCCD, including Russian Federation, China and Mongolia in North-East Asia⁴.

4. Global consensus has emerged on the inter-linkages among DLD, biodiversity and climate change. SDG 15 (life on land) manifests that “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”. UNCCD COP13 called for ensuring that LDN targets and related activities create leverage and synergies with the climate and biodiversity agendas, and for mainstreaming dust and sand storms into national disaster risk reduction policies⁵. The figure below indicates these inter-linkages including the director drivers, benefits and solutions to DLD based on the NEASPEC experience.

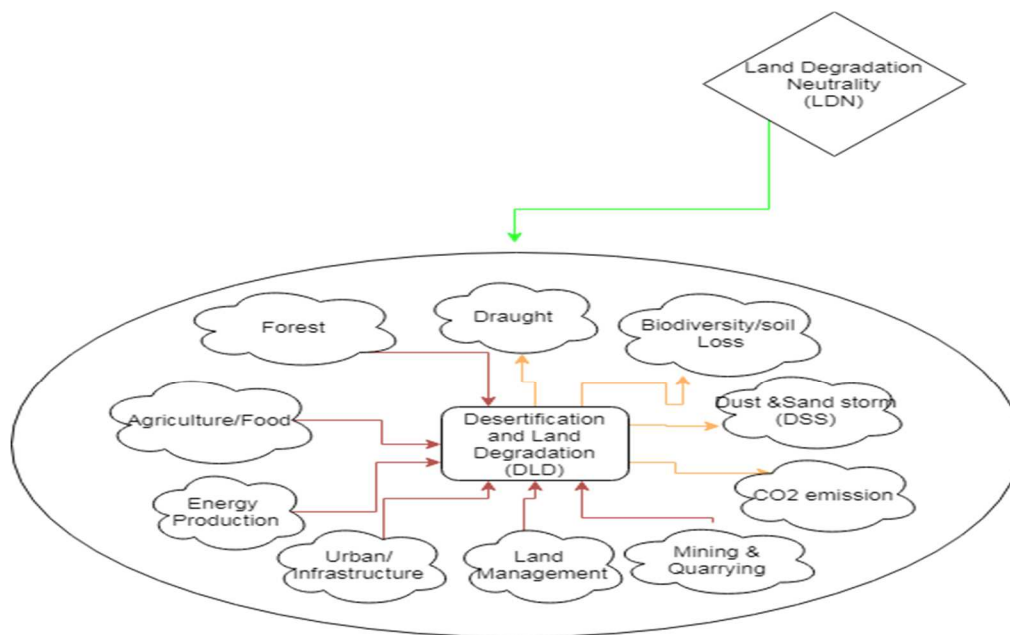


Figure 1: Causal relationships among different sectors
 →: Drivers of DLD
 →: Consequences of DLD
 →: Solution for DLD
 Source: UNCCD Global Land Outlook (1st edition) & NEASPEC

5. The *Ordos Declaration* endorsed by more than 80 Ministers at UNCCD COP13 urges countries to: step up efforts on all fronts to tackle desertification; take a proactive approach to

³ LDN baseline is the initial value of each of the indicators used to monitor progress in achieving LDN. The baseline values of these indicators are averaged over the period leading up to implementation of the LDN conceptual framework and re-measured to determine the change in land based natural capital (UNCCD-SPI, 2017, p.44)

⁴[https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/List%20of%20countries%20setting%20LDN%20targets%20%28as%20of%20Sept%202018%29.pdf)

[files/List%20of%20countries%20setting%20LDN%20targets%20%28as%20of%20Sept%202018%29.pdf](https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/List%20of%20countries%20setting%20LDN%20targets%20%28as%20of%20Sept%202018%29.pdf)

⁵ <https://www.unccd.int/official-documents/cop-13-ordos-china-2017/cop1321add1>

enhance cooperation and coordination at global, regional and subregional levels to address the causes and impacts of drought and sand and dust storms including through the promotion of sustainable water use and land management; and encourages the public and private sector to continue to invest in developing technologies, methods and tools to combat DLD and drought in different regions, and to boost knowledge exchange (including of traditional knowledge), capacity building and sharing of technologies⁶.

II. OVERVIEW OF SUBREGIONAL PROGRESS IN DESERTIFICATION AND LAND DEGRADATION

6. Following to hosting the UNCCD COP13 in September 2017 with fruitful outcomes, China pledged to participate in the LDN Target Setting Programme, and to scale up its efforts to combat desertification through establishing a “Belt and Road Cooperative Mechanism for Combating Desertification”⁷. In connection to the inauguration of National Forestry and Grassland Administration as part of the government institutional reform, China reaffirmed its commitment to taking an integrated approach of managing landscape, forest land, lakes and grassland, increasing China’s forest stock by 4.5 billion cubic meters by 2030 compared with 2005 level, preserving the areas of grassland which accounts for 40.9 per cent of China’s total national land area⁸, supported by a newly established North-East Ecological Big Data Center⁹ to support science-based policy making process on ecosystem conservation.

7. The Russian Federation possesses the most extensive woodland in the world, occupying 1/5 of the world’s forest, with the total area of woodland reaching to 1,183.3 million hectares. In accordance, Russia has pledged to submit LDN Target to the UNCCD.

8. Mongolia pledged to submit LDN Targets. It plans to reduce the area of desertified land to 60% in comparison to the base level of 78.2% in 2014, and raise the forest cover from 8.1% in 2014 to 9.0% by 2030¹⁰. Furthermore, area of green facilities in urban area and settlements are to be raised to 15% of the total area by the year of 2020¹¹.

⁶ <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/inline-files/Ordos%20declaration.pdf>

⁷ Belt and Road Cooperative Mechanism for Combating Desertification is a cooperative framework to fight against desertification across Eurasia linking China, Middle East, Europe, and Africa. It was set up at the side event of the COP13

⁸ http://english.forestry.gov.cn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1972:area-and-distribution-of-grassland-in-china&catid=21&Itemid=105

⁹ http://english.forestry.gov.cn/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1952:northeast-ecological-big-data-center-inaugurated&catid=21&Itemid=105

¹⁰ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.FRST.ZS?locations=MN>

¹¹ Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030 (2016)

9. Mongolia recently hosted a workshop on “Combating desertification technology, approach and investment” on in June 2018 in Ulaanbaatar, in cooperation with Ministry of Construction and Urban Development Agency and supported by Korea-Mongolia Green Belt project¹². The aim of this workshop was to discuss on national targets for LDN, create a platform to share best practices of land management and promote public-private partnership for land restoration. Through the workshop, all members agreed that to halt mining activities in forest, watershed headwaters and major wetlands, appropriate planning and development is needed. Furthermore, Mongolia also indicated the need to integrate LDN targets to the national level and necessary taxation mechanism to be used as an investment platform was drawn as a conclusion¹³.

10. Republic of Korea (ROK) has announced a major plan to strengthen forest management as carbon sequestration sink. It plans to integrate with international CO₂ trading market and expand carbon emission certificate project through REDD+. ROK has further expressed its interest in expanding its contribution to the international community, in particular in forestry collaboration with Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) and mitigate DPRK’s deforestation. The Second Meeting of Asia-Pacific Urban Forestry Meeting was held in September 2017 and developed “Seoul Action Plan for the development of Urban Forestry in the Asia-Pacific Region”. The Seoul Action Plan envisions a 10-year-frame with the goal of: i) expanding awareness of the benefits of urban forest and trees bring to communities throughout the Asia-Pacific Region; ii) sustaining and fostering the growth of urban forests and trees as key contributors to resilient cities; iii) supporting the local and national decision makers in planning, designing and managing their green capital; and iv) providing guidance on the key actions to be taken towards more sustainable urban development .

11. Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) has defined agroforestry as an important economic strategy to achieve food security and restore damaged and degraded forests and to create a reliable production basis for sustainable economic development while accelerating forest ecosystem restoration, and has developed its National Agroforestry Strategy and Action Plan (NASAP) for 2015-2024¹⁴ to be implemented in all provinces, cities and counties. All central and local governments will develop and implement their own annual plans as part of the national economic plan. In addition, land users such as enterprises, cooperatives and locals will make an annual land use plan to plant trees and protect forest as required by the national afforestation plan. Under the Paris Agreement, DPRK has pledged afforestation efforts to afforest and reforest

¹² <https://www.unccd.int/sites/default/files/event-map/pdf/WORLD%20DAY%20TO%20COMBAT%20DESERTIFICATION%202018%20IN%20MONGOLIA.pdf>

¹³ Mongolia Sustainable Development Vision 2030

¹⁴ https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/countries/countries-content/the-democratic-people-s-republic-of-korea/en/DPRK-AF-Strategy-2015-2024_EN.pdf

1.67 million hectares of mountain areas by 2024 at the meeting of High-Level Signature Ceremony for Paris Agreement¹⁵.

12. Japan plans to establish the cyclic rotation of “harvest, use and reforest” while promoting thinning practices to allow fulfilment of multiple functions of forests, enhancing social, environmental and economic benefit. Along with this, Japan wishes to turn forestry sector into a growth industry through sustainable use of forest resources and improve forest management in disadvantaged area¹⁶. Japan has launched Joint Crediting Mechanism REDD+ in 2015 to implement activities for REDD+ and use them for contributing to achieve Japan’s emission reduction target. By doing so, Japan plans to afforest areas in developing countries and simultaneously offset domestic carbon emission. Japan plans to host Group on Earth Observation (GEO)¹⁷ week on 29 October-2 November 2018 with the focus on three priority areas: the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Climate Agreement and the UN SDGs at Kyoto.

III. NEASPEC’S WORK ON DESERTIFICATION AND LAND DEGRADATION

13. NEASPEC had carried out a project “Implementing the Regional Master Plan for the Prevention and Control of Dust and Sandstorms (DSS) in North-East Asia” during 2010-2012, which involved a demonstration project on tree planting, development of a GIS-based database on Desertification and Land Degradation (DLD) projects in Mongolia, production and distribution of awareness raising materials in Zamyn-Uud, and workshops for knowledge sharing.

14. NEASPEC and the Institute of Desertification Studies (IDS) under the Chinese Academy of Forestry jointly organized two capacity training workshops for Mongolian experts and government officials during 19-26 September in 2011 and 22-28 September 2013, respectively. The workshops offered a unique opportunity to bring together Chinese and Mongolian experts and officials to exchange information and experience, as well as to explore practicality of techniques in the Mongolian context.

¹⁵ Statement by H.E. Mr. RI SU YONG, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the DPRK at the Meeting of the High-Level Signature Ceremony for Paris Agreement, New York, 22 April 2016

¹⁶ Japan’s Voluntary National Review-Report on the Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (2017)

¹⁷ The Group on Earth Observations (GEO) is well-positioned to assist the UNCCD and its contracting parties with the rapid provision and deployment of EO datasets, country support, capacity building and training, along with Earth observation (EO) tools and platforms so that countries can effectively monitor and report on SDG indicator 15.3.1 every four years starting in 2018, as well as support longer term efforts to develop international standards and protocols on LDN and land degradation monitoring. (<https://www.earthobservations.org/activity.php?id=149>)

15. The NEASPEC Secretariat and the State Forestry Administration (SFA) of China jointly organized the Workshop on Desertification and Land Degradation on 7-8 July 2015 in Beijing, China, and developed the North-East Asia Multi-Stakeholder Plan (NEAMSP) as a practical tool to support and bring together stakeholders, including the public sector, private sector and civil society, through sharing their activity plans in a common place and common language to enhance coordination and cooperation on DLD. The Plan as an online database maps out the geographical locations of projects and consolidates project information to present DLD activities carried out by various agencies. The NEAMSP was designed and can benefit the user groups to¹⁸:

- Collect information of current and planned activities of participating agencies and key stakeholders in six activity areas, including: land restoration and ecosystem services, capacity and understanding, integration of DLD into socio-economic development and resilience, resource mobilization, stakeholder engagement, and awareness raising;
- Review overall DLD actions in the subregion to identify challenges and opportunities, and support subregional reporting;
- Inform organizational planning and enabling identification of partners and opportunities for cooperation or resource mobilization; and
- Provide essential and latest information for potential donors to motivate their participation and identify entry points and potential partners.

16. In parallel with the NEAMSP, the 21st Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-21) supported the proposal of “the Study on North-East Asia Land Degradation Neutrality and Sustainable Development”, which aims to (1) strengthen knowledge and understanding of LDN in the subregion both as a problem and a solution; (2) identify key opportunities of intersectoral and international collaboration in bringing multiple benefits from LDN; and (3) share experiences and lessons learnt in LDN-related challenges within and beyond the subregion. Since then, NEASPEC Secretariat had consultations about the study plan with major stakeholders including the UNCCD Secretariat and the Korea Forestry Service, as the Secretariat of the Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought Network North-East Asia Network (DLDD-NEAN).

17. Meanwhile, UNCCD Secretariat and the DLDD-NEAN have initiated the preparation of the Global Land Outlook’s Northeast Asia Thematic Report, “Progress towards achieving land degradation neutrality” and held the scoping meeting on 6-7 July 2018 in Seoul, which was also attended by the NEASPEC Secretariat. Considering the duplication between NEASPEC’s

¹⁸ NEAMSP concept note: <http://www.neaspec.org/sites/default/files/1.%20NEAMSP%20Concept%20Note.pdf>

proposed study and this thematic report, NEASPEC could make contributions to this thematic report instead of implementing its initial plan.

18. Furthermore, the DLDD-NEAN, which was founded in 2011 by the Republic of Korea, China and Mongolia, with participation of DPRK, Japan and the Russian Federation as observers, has emerged as a main platform for policy dialogue and cooperation among the key national ministries and agencies responsible for DLD.

19. Given the overlap of key stakeholders and activities between DLDD-NEAN and NEASPEC's work on DLD, the NEASPEC Secretariat would like to seek member States' views on the possible options for future direction:

- i. Discontinuing the programmatic work area on DLD under NEASPEC to avoid duplication with the DLDD-NEAN;
- ii. Focusing on operating the NEAMSP to help stakeholders share and disseminate information and coordinate activities on DLD;
- iii. Refocusing NEASPEC's work towards interlinkages between DLD with other sectors, such as climate change, agroforestry, etc.

IV. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

20. The Meeting may wish to invite member States to share views and guidance on the three options above.

21. The Meeting may wish to invite member States to propose specific areas of work if there is a consensus on the continuation of the DLD work.

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