



Distr.: Limited

11 August 2025

English only

UNITED NATIONS

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR ASIA AND THE PACIFIC

Twenty-eighth Senior Officials Meeting (SOM-28) of the North-East Asian Subregional Programme for Environmental Cooperation (NEASPEC)

22-23 September 2025

Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

REVIEW OF PROGRAMME PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

(Item 5 (e) of the provisional agenda)

Desertification and Land Degradation

Note by the Secretariat

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I. BACKGROUND

1. Desertification and land degradation (DLD) present significant obstacles to sustainable development in North-East Asia, with profound impacts on ecological health, economic resilience, and the well-being of communities. These challenges are further intensified by climate change, which amplifies the risks of population displacement, resource shortages, and food insecurity.
2. In response to these concerns, NEASPEC implemented a series of capacity-building, knowledge-sharing, and training initiatives between 2011 and 2013, aimed at addressing DLD, and adopted the North-East Asia Multi-Stakeholder Plan on Combating DLD (NEAMSP) at its 20th Senior Officials Meeting in 2016.
3. Also, to align efforts and create synergies between NEASPEC and the North-East Asia Desertification, Land Degradation and Drought Network (DLDD-NEAN), member States reviewed NEASPEC's programme, and this led to the adoption of NEASPEC's approach, which emphasizes addressing the underlying causes and consequences of DLD in 2023. The 27th Senior Officials Meeting, convened in Beijing in 2024, underscored the importance of targeted training and policy dialogue to effectively tackle DLD across the subregion.

II. PROGRESS OF THE ACTIVITIES ON DESERTIFICATION AND LAND DEGRADATION

Knowledge Production: Research and Policy Advice

4. At the 27th Senior Officials Meeting, member States approved NEASPEC to conduct a study on the main causes, drivers, and impacts of desertification and land degradation in North-East Asia.
5. To prepare the paper in alignment with the upcoming COP17 of the UNCCD in 2026, the Secretariat consulted with Mongolia in April, and the **Policy Paper on Climate, Land and Water** is planned to examine the climate, land, and water nexus in addressing DLD in North-East Asia. It will review national and regional policies and strategies, identify interlinkages, and offer actionable recommendations.
6. While the secretariat has collected relevant cases and official data in preparation for the paper, an expert has been identified to work on the paper, tentatively from

September. Once the draft annotated outline is prepared, it will be circulated to member States for review and guidance. The paper is planned to be finalized in the first half of 2026, and the outcome will inform discussions among member States and support collaborative initiatives, including COP17 of the UNCCD in 2026.

Knowledge sharing: Capacity building

7. In conjunction with the 28th Senior Officials Meeting, the Secretariat, together with the DLDD-NEAN Secretariat and the National Forest Agency of Mongolia, will convene a **subregional forum on desertification and land degradation (DLD)** on 24 September. The forum will bring together government officials and key stakeholders from North-East Asia to promote dialogue and strengthen subregional cooperation on DLD.

8. Immediately following the forum, a **training workshop on addressing DLD in North-East Asia** considering the impact of climate change and sectoral policies will be held from 24 to 26 September, jointly organized by the Secretariat and the National Forest Agency of Mongolia. Participants will attend the forum on the first day, followed by two days of technical sessions aimed at enhancing practical knowledge and fostering regional collaboration on DLD (see Annex II).

Knowledge dissemination: Outreach activities

9. Further raising the visibility of the issue, a special event on Sand and Dust Storms (SDS) was held in April 2025 during the 81st Session of ESCAP, underscoring the urgency of joint action and advocating for stronger collective responses.

III. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

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

- (a) Propose collaborative activities on DLD in North-East Asia in line with the seventeenth session of the Conference of Parties (COP17) of the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, which will be held in Mongolia in August 2026; and
- (b) Review and approve the proposed activity plan for 2026 (Annex I).

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