

Republic of Korea

2. Desertification (Focal points: Ministry of Environment, Korea Forest Service)

General Status

The Republic of Korea does not have any problem of the spread of desertification within the territory, but is faced with the serious impacts of DSS from deserts in China and Mongolia every year. Due to DSS in 2002, 4,373 schools had to be closed and the 164 flights were canceled. Respiratory diseases and damage to the crops were caused as well by DSS. The average annual occurrence of DSS in Korea was only 3.9 days in the 1980's, but it increased to 7.7 days during the 1990's and 12.4 days in the 2000's. In 2006, DSS occurred seven times (11 days) in Seoul .

Countermeasures against desertification and DSS

Countermeasures against desertification and DSS were set up in cooperation with the Ministry of Environment, the Korea Forest Service, the Korea Meteorological Administration and other concerned administrations in 2002. As a domestic project, a forecasting system for DSS has been operated and response guidelines have been established. Meanwhile, the international cooperation projects, which are plantation and research projects for combating desertification and DSS in China and Mongolia, have been conducted.

‘The National Action Plan on Combating Desertification and Mitigating DSS’ was set up in cooperation with 14 administrations including the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Korea Forest Service and the Korea Meteorological Administration, in 2006, and systematic and persistent efforts in mitigating DSS have been made. The Action Plan states that a committee on DSS prevention should be set up and that international cooperation should be enhanced more. Further, ‘Framework Act on Management of Disaster and Safety’ includes the measures against desertification and DSS. In particular, the Republic of Korea amended the Clean Air Conservation Act to prepare a system for countermeasures against DSS, as a part of disaster management. As specific projects, a forecasting system and an observation network have been developed and established for accurate forecast of DSS. As a result, the accuracy rate of DSS forecast has been improved from 57% in 2006 to 60% in 2007, and will be increased to 70% in 2010.

The government proceeded with an international cooperation project titled 'Greenbelt Plantation Project in Mongolia' for combating desertification and DSS. The project, with the USD 9.5 million of budget, aims to afforest 3,000 ha in the desert area or semiarid area such as Dalanzadgad for 10 years from 2007 to 2016 and to bring international interest and participation through showing a successful model of plantation projects for preventing desertification. In addition, the government has been conducting a plantation project with around USD 0.3 million budget for combating desertification in Inner Mongolia with a NGO named ‘Korea-China Future Forest’.

The Republic of Korea has recognized that there is a need for inter-governmental cooperation for combating desertification and DSS, and planned to hold a ministerial meeting and a general-director level meeting among Korea, China and Japan for promoting practical cooperation. The Republic of Korea also plans to establish an environmental cooperative body

of Northeast Asia in which China, Japan, Mongolia, Republic of Korea and D.P.R Korea can participate together in the future.