

Preface

Land degradation in dryland ecosystem has become a major environmental problem that is threatening human life and social development. A common task in the 21st century for all countries in the world is to combat land degradation and desertification, to secure global ecological safety and to achieve sustainable development. China is one of the countries that are subjected to severe land degradation. Currently, the land area subjected to sandy desertification in China reached 1.743 million square kilometers, accounting for 18.2% of the total land area of China. Sandy desertification is not only directly threatening the life and development of more than 100 million people and affecting the living conditions and life quality of more than 400 million people, but also causing direct economic loss as high as tens of billions RMB. Land degradation has already become the key factor restraining sustainable economic and social development in western China. Chinese government has paid great attention to the problem and taken a series of major measures to promote restoration and rehabilitation of forest and grass vegetation in arid and semi arid regions, aiming to accelerate ecological and environmental improvement in the western region. Particularly worth to mention is that the implementation of several major ecological programs such as natural forest protection program, land conversion from cropping to tree growing, from pasturing to grass growing, and desertification control in origins of sandstorms around Beijing-Tianjin region has resulted in significant improvement of the conditions.

To explore effective approaches to address land degradation, Chinese government attaches great importance to exchange and cooperation with international community. The government established a partnership with GEF (Global Environment Facility) on land degradation in dryland ecosystem, which is the first one that the Chinese government reached with GEF in land degradation control. The partnership will employ the concept of integrated ecosystem management (IEM) in land degradation control in the arid regions in western China. Through long-term programming, the partnership will develop an integrated inter-agency and cross-region management system, which will effectively integrate and harmonize policies, laws, programs and activities. Ecosystem restoration in arid regions will be enhanced through research, development and extension of IEM and land degradation control technologies that are suited to local realistic situations, in order to achieve the objectives of ecological improvement, environment protection, poverty reduction and sustainable economic and social development.

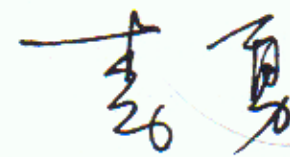
The partnership on land degradation differs from GEF traditional project based approach, it is a new model of GEF for long-term and framework cooperation, which is in large-scale, sequenced and programmed. The partnership indicated that exchanges and cooperation between Chinese government and GEF has started a successful step in a wider and newer field. The cooperation is not only a useful effort

to institutional and policy innovations for land degradation control in western China, but also of great significance of demonstrating the integrated dryland ecosystem management to the world.

Successful implementation of the partnership will push forward the dissemination and application of the IEM concepts in China. By enhancing the understanding and practices of IEM approach of the participating agencies and the project provinces (regions) and by further improving policies and legal framework for land degradation control, the partnership will accelerate the process of land degradation control in arid regions in western China and effectively promote rehabilitation of the fragile ecosystems in western China, thus contributing to the improvement of global environment. Meanwhile, local people can get long-term benefit from the enhancement of natural resources and get rid of over-reliance on natural resources.

In order to learn from international experiences, and to find effective approaches to address land degradation in arid regions in western China, the Ministry of Finance and the State Forestry Administration jointly organized an international workshop on integrated ecosystem management in November 1-2, 2004. The workshop provided a useful platform for participants for exchanging experiences and discussing difference practices. The IEM experiences and practices in different countries or regions provided examples and references for developing an IEM model suited to China's realistic situation and local conditions in the western region.

The partnership covers a period of 10 years, and it will produce long-term impacts on evolution of ideology due to application of IEM in western China. The protection and management of fragile ecosystems provided by the partnership will be sustainable. In the new historical period, Chinese government persists to the human-centered scientific approach to holistic, harmonized and sustainable development, highlighting balanced urban and rural development, balanced regional development, harmonized economic and social development, harmonized human and nature development, balanced domestic development and opening-up to the outside world. Implementation of the partnership is a major activity of practicing the scientific approach to development. It will play active roles in the improving ecological environment and sustaining economic and social development in western China.



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