

Session 10: Strategic Discussion Part III
Contributions from RCEs for engagement with the SDGs
14:00-15:30, Friday, 25 November, 2016

The objective of this session was to address *how RCEs are or can engage in the implementation of the SDGs, keeping their local priorities, challenges, and contexts in mind while engaging with a set of global aspirations*. The panellists were invited to discuss the following questions:

- How is your country or region engaging with the SDGs?
- How does the community context you operate in inform which SDGs are priorities for your RCE?
- How does your local context create challenges for addressing these goals – what roadblocks do you face in your efforts to educate in relation to this issue?
- What unique opportunities exist within your RCE's region that allow for innovative approaches for using ESD as a tool for implementing the SDGs?

Moderator: Dr. Philip Vaughter, UNU-IAS

Panellists:

Ayub Ndaruga (NEMA-Kenya)

Dr. Suratman (RCE Yogyakarta)

Jen Dollin (RCE Greater Western Sydney, GWS)

Ms. Margaret Fleming (RCE East Midlands)

Mr. Usman Muhammad (RCE Kano)

Introduction:

RCE East Midlands: Just preparing for this question was a great experience, as we are a grassroots group and are currently at a point of preparing our activities and engagements.

RCE Yogyakarta: Now that the SDGs were in place the REC was preparing to implement these, with approaching student communities in different districts as a first step. In governance, business and communities the focus lies on food, renewable energy and improving gender equality. For RCE Yogyakarta it would be great if there was a global student community from other RCEs to help implement the SDGs.

NEMA: The situation in Kenya was very specific as RCEs are part of the ESD process nationally. NEMA gives RCEs targets and evaluation as well as funding support.

RCE GWS: We are hoping to engage more with our pacific RCEs as well as in Australia and New Zealand.

RCE Kano: Youth activities and climate change were major foci.

How is your country or region engaging with the SDGs? How does the community context you operate in inform which SDGs are priorities for your RCE?

RCE East Midlands: All UK RCEs were working in different ways. During the RCE Europe meeting in London, they had not talked about the SDGs. Currently they were trying to grasp the communities' needs and were organising a conference in 2017 to ask that. Quality education was the major focus which was highly interconnected and required a more holistic approach. One needed national experts that were connected on quality education.

RCE Yogyakarta: Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) implements its wisdom into local solutions. We talk about food, health and how to educate people. Indigenous experience was very strong in Kalimantan as one example and hence was implemented. We are also linked to other ASEAN countries like the Philippines.

NEMA: In Kenya we have a [Framework for implementing SDGs](#) in Kenya. There was a performance contract by the president that RCEs needed to report on their progress with the SDGs. Items included for example pollution control and gender issues. Each institution reports on the issues they are working on. SDGs were being implemented in different institutions. Then depending on their performance there could be sanctions.

RCE GWS: Some areas were more promising than others, for example in climate change, ESD university education looked very promising in Australia.

RCE Kano: In Africa there was an SDGs platform, where countries can come together and Nigeria has been one of them. Education in our RCE was very important. Energy was a particularly strong topic due to desert encroachment and climate change. Problems are tackled by planting trees and engaging on the community level/

How does the community context you operate in inform which SDGs are priorities for your RCE?

RCE East Midlands: There was additional stimulus currently with a full time education coordinator being funded by regional services. The RCE felt a strong connection to this. The RCE also used schools as a context which they found extremely important.

RCE Yogyakarta: Education was the link to the SDGs whereby they asked other local universities and local businesses for advice. Then they would start work in the most critical fields.

NEMA: Under their umbrella there were several universities and nine RCEs. Because of the requirement of implementing SDGs, they all engaged in a similar way. They had developed a community of practice for universities and a university network. It was important to start by developing a sustainability policy for each university. The [Greening University Toolkit by UNEP](#) helped achieve this and was adapted to Kenya. Universities mainly engaged in these main areas: engage students, curriculum innovation, identify communities, and greening of the university. Each RCE received money for events to strengthen partnership and networking among the stakeholders.

RCE GWS: They depended much on the local responses, Australia being a dry continent but with rivers. Biodiversity was one focus. The RCEs topics included water, feeding into urbanisation, agriculture and other issues.

RCE Kano: Many problems were interrelated. Education was the key to some of these problems. People need to be sensitized to the causes of the issues at hand, for example desertification. Nigeria will be the third most populous country in 2030 so currently there was a big focus on education about population regulation. Energy and poverty being the two other most pressing challenges.

How does your local context create challenges for addressing these goals – what roadblocks do you face in your efforts to educate in relation to this issue?

RCE East Midlands: Nationally for all RCEs there was a challenge given by the strict education curriculum in the UK that had been developed originally, without any ESD expert support. But it was also an opportunity such as getting outdoor learning into primary schools. 80% of students demanded that sustainability was part of their curriculum. From a competitive perspective, UK universities are also now competing on being the greenest one.

RCE Yogyakarta: The major challenges were how to develop effective collaborations? Considering often they included many different stakeholders ranging from politicians to teachers to implement an SDG programme.

NEMA: The challenges we face in Kenya are many but the key ones are university privatisation, as RCEs were attached to universities, organising activities was difficult, as the RCE was not the major focus for the institution. Especially since the RCEs are usually not part of the mainstream budget of the university. They were also weak in mobilising. When one funds meetings, often membership was concentrated in one county so the outreach was not far. Implementing targets was also a challenge in capacity development. One good example was on how to determine a carbon footprint, so we trained them on how to measure emissions. It was particularly difficult in terms of scientific capacity development and policy implementation.

RCE GWS: In schools SDGs were now embedded in the curriculum. Her own daughter's teacher for example received the UNESCO feed. However, there were no text books yet on ESD and SDGs. Clearly the western thinking focussed on one discipline and there were gaps in cross-disciplinary-thinking or innovative thinking. Here was a window on how to teach in different entry points through the curricula, for example in geography or legal studies.

RCE Kano: One major challenge was to get women to participate. Here culture played a large role.

What unique opportunities exist within your RCE's region that allow for innovative approaches for using ESD as a tool to implement the SDGs? What are the hopes you have?

RCE East Midlands: One good example was the problem solving context. Collective learning was what was really needed to have a dialogue that looks at all the real life problems.

RCE Yogyakarta: They had established a campus park as an example that shows promising advances in ESD.

NEMA: There were several opportunities: money sent to counties was an opportunity for RCEs to team up and get to these resources. When one is hungry and poor it was easy to mobilise people which otherwise could be exploited. People in Kenya were not happy with the status quo. Then together with UNU, RCEs can become a brand.

RCE GWS: Here there were two opportunities: innovative thinking and innovative technology. It was not just technology but also thinking which was important. RCE GWS was built on an innovative thinking model from Belgium where one developed a business model with 0 waste and more than one product as output. The use of technology to engage people was also crucial. Change makers often developed local based technology for local people.

RCE Kano: There was a Nigerian saying that there is hope when there is life, for me there is hope when there is youth. In Africa and in Nigeria in particular, the youth were important. Youth has been a point for innovation. For example, with producing software to get the farmers' products to a global market. Youth were quite resourceful.

Summary by Philip Vaughter: We have heard how communities are engaging, we heard that this may occur through universities, NGOs, and the public. It was all really inspiring. Challenges included how to influence curricula, consolidate SDGs instead of thinking of them separately and to work across disciplines. Many opportunities have been presented, with the outcomes seen as learning opportunities themselves. One example was opportunity for innovation through youth.