



REPORT OF MY PARTICIPATION AT THE 5TH AFRICAN RCE CONFERENCE ENTEBBE, UGANDA 14th-16th OCTOBER, 2015

BY
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THEME: "BUILDING A STRONGER RCE/ESD NETWORK FOR TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES"

INTRODUCTION

The 5th African RCE conference was the first to take place in Uganda. The conference was hosted by the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), in collaboration with the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS), the Uganda National Commission for UNESCO (UNATCOM), and several Ugandan RCEs with the lead universities being Busitema University (BU) and Mbarara University of Science and Technology (MUST). It ran from 14th to 16th October 2015 at the Imperial Botanical Beach Hotel and Convention Centre, Entebbe, Uganda.

OPENING, PLENARY AND PARALLEL SESSIONS

At the beginning of the conference, Professor Naituli delivered a special paper that centered on the need for African countries to have a paradigm shift in our quest for sustainable development and participation of RCEs in Africa in order to contribute to a sustainable society. There were also keynote presentations by Dr. Abel Atiti from UNU-IAS on ***"The status of African RCEs: successes, challenges and charting the way forward"*** and Dr. Saba Bokhari, ESD Specialist, UNESCO Regional Office for Eastern Africa, Nairobi Kenya, on ***"The Link between ESD and the Sustainable Development Goals – and Role of RCEs"***. Dr. Atiti laid the background on what an RCE is and the network span of RCEs. He agreed that there were challenges with some of the RCEs regarding their heterogeneity, and lack of political will among other challenges. He also highlighted numerous achievements of RCEs such as for example the ability to translate a common vision into regional sustainable development realities. Dr. Saba on the other hand centered her presentation on the common areas UNESCO and UNU support in line with ESD and SDGs in relation to RCEs.

After the plenary session, the conference split into parallel sessions, with several presentations from different RCE and non-RCE members. RCE Minna held two presentations. The first presentation on

“Advancing Innovative Policies and Local Solutions for Community Transformation: A Case study of Safe Water Transportation for Local Communities” by Ibrahim Akibu Ja’afaru which showed a safe, easy and cheap design for canoes. The presentation was commended by numerous delegates at the conference in view of its unique way of solving the reoccurring boat mishap around the riverine areas in Nigeria. The second presentation titled ***‘A perspective on the significance of cemeteries in peaceful co-existence and conservation of biodiversity in urban areas; the case of Minna, Nigeria’***, was presented by **the** Coordinator of RCE Minna, Dr. Abdul Husaini. It focused on the use of cemeteries as open spaces in cities and as a sanctuary for biodiversity. The paper emphasized the need for adequate provision of such spaces in the face of increasing urbanization.

RCE MEETING

The second day of the conference saw another series of parallel sessions and presentations. However, during the afternoon the RCE members had an opportunity to meet separately to discuss numerous issues ranging from implementation of the GAP and SDG, the Africa RCE youth movement, a shift in the UNU programme approach, increasing collaboration, submitting RCEs annual reports to the UNU- IAS and the sustainability of RCEs, among others. However, as a youth the highlight of the meeting was the recognition of the African RCE Youth Network and the readiness of African RCEs to organise an African RCE Youth Summit which will hopefully be hosted by RCE Kano, Nigeria. During the meeting the RCEs also agreed that there was a need for African RCEs to collaborate with other organisations such as the African Union (AU), USAID, UNESCO and others in order to receive recognition as key players in sustainable development.

RCE YOUTH SESSION

Although there was no special session for youth at the conference, the youth present at the conference came together to discuss issues related to youth participation and contribution of RCE activities across Africa and beyond. The meeting was held on the second day of the conference, during the lunch break. There were five youth in attendance, two from Uganda and two from Nigeria and one from Kenya. The discussion drew the attention of the UNU- IAS representative present at the conference, Ms. Ikuno Suzuki called on the youth to continue to create avenues of sharing ideas such as hosting webinars, Skype meetings and any other available means in order to keep the network vibrant and effective.

OUTCOMES

Some of the successful outcomes of the conference especially related to youth include the following:

- African RCE Youth Summit to be hosted by RCE Kano, Nigeria (date to be decided)
- Development of contact data base for RCE youth across Africa

- Creation of a programme to harness the potential of rural Youth, using the Nature Uganda as a case study
- Creation of a facebook and twitter page for the African RCE Youth Network and a mail group in the interim
- Creation of an African RCE Youth Network website for long term networking and coverage
- Increased sharing of RCE youth programmes and activities
- Various RCEs to provide youth mentoring

ROUND UP DINNER AND EXCURSIONS

After the presentations, meetings and discussions it was time to relax. Delegates were treated to the colourful Ugandan Culture and tradition, with cultural dance and mouth watering delicacies. It was a night for all to wine, dine and to relax. The cultural troops succeeded in bringing all to dance and share a moment of joy together.

On the third day of the conference, delegates had the opportunity to embark on a 45 minute journey to Kampala the capital city of Uganda. Everyone visited the Kabaka Royal Tombs (the resting place for the departed kings and their children), the Kasubi (Buganda Parliament) and the Uganda Museum. It was an educative and memorable experience.

CONCLUSION

The 2015 African RCE Conference provided a remarkable programme with many ideas to follow up on, and memories to remember.. It opened the door for African RCEs to contribute more to sustainable development in Africa, as group in line with GAP and the SDGs. More RCEs are needed across Africa to achieve this dream. It is our hope that when meeting again, hopefully in Kenya, many of the challenges discussed during the conference, will have been tackled.