

DRAFT REPORT ON THE 3RD AFRICAN REGIONAL CENTER OF EXPERTISE (RCE) CONTINENTAL MEETING HELD AT THE NUC AUDITORIUM ON THE 20TH AND 21ST AUGUST 2013

INTRODUCTION

The Regional Centers of Expertise (RCE) meeting is a meeting of the African RCEs to discuss Education for sustainable Development (ESD) issues in Africa ahead of the annual RCE Global Conference which comes up in November 2013 in Nairobi, Kenya. The event was held at the NUC Auditorium on Tuesday and Wednesday, the 20th and 21st of August 2013.

OBJECTIVES OF RCE

The objectives of the RCEs are:

- To make universities the drivers of sustainable development for their local communities and globally in partnership with other stakeholders in education;
- To encourage the Universities to focus on training and research activities on issues that are crucial to national development and seek to find solutions for them
- For the Universities to create the necessary awareness that will drive the theme “ **Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)**”

DAY 1

The RCE meeting started in the NUC main auditorium at 11am.

The Executive Secretary in his welcome address expressed joy that the meeting was coming at a time that the universities were being called upon to pick up the gauntlet and step into their expected roles as producers of knowledge and innovation necessary for national development. He stated that University systems across the globe are recognized as the drivers of sustainable development of their local communities in tandem with their primary objectives of teaching, research and community development.

According to the ES, the National Universities Commission (NUC), recognizes the need to ensure that our universities are at par with standards worldwide, and to ensure the production of graduates and research development that would be globally competitive. The NUC will continue to encourage the Universities to focus training and research activities on particular challenging areas that are crucial to the development of their host communities and the nation. He expressed his disappointment that of all the Universities in the country, only three (3) have keyed into the RCE initiative namely: The Federal University of Technology, Minna; Bayero University, Kano and the University of Lagos. He finally called on the Nigerian Universities System (NUS) to key into this RCE initiative in the fulfillment of their mandates and to position the education sector as a key to the sustainable development of the nation.

In her address, the minister welcomed the participants to the meeting as they have come to discuss the RCE initiatives and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) plans and programmes in Africa. She said that this administration

recognizes that Nigeria cannot make sustainable economic progress without quality education that addresses development challenges. Our Universities must therefore see themselves as champions of our desire for progress and position themselves as leaders in addressing problems where they exist. It is for this reason that the Federal Government has deliberately established Federal Universities in all the states of the Federation and expects them to work with their host State and Local Government and communities and other Non-governmental actors to direct their research and outreach programmes at addressing development challenges. She called on the NUC to institute a means of encouraging Universities to live up to their community outreach mandates by engaging community-centric research.

The Minister commended the managements of the three Universities that have led stakeholders in pursuit of this noble objective by keying into the initiative for providing the leadership and she challenged the rest of the Nigerian universities to follow in their examples to make a difference in host communities.

In his address, the Chief Servant and Executive Governor of Niger State, Dr. Mu'azu thanked the organizers of the third RCE continental meeting for the opportunity to be part of this laudable initiative. He said that the United Nation (UN) Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) identified research and innovation as key strategies for implementing the vision of education for sustainable development (ESD). As a result, research and community engagement in addressing sustainability issues must become a fundamental objective of higher education institutions as citadels of learning. This underscores the significance of this important African RCE continental meeting. He gave the assurance that the Niger State Government remains committed to the success of the RCE initiative with a view to making RCE Minna an example for the country and indeed the continent. He stated some initiatives of the Niger state Government

since 2007 to include Honorarium for inaugural Lectures by Professors in the Universities in Niger State; the creation of specialized ministry of environment, parks, gardens and forest resources; the construction of 1550 houses to enhance standard of living of the people.

He acknowledged the support of the ES of the NUC, Professor Julius A. Okojie to RCE Minna and the RCE movement in Africa. He then declared the RCE meeting open.

The vote of thanks was given by Dr Abdul of RCE Minna who thanked all the dignitaries and participants for being present.

TECHNICAL SESSION 1 (Chaired by Professor G.N. Nsofor)

Professor Rob O'Donoghue of RCE Makana and Rhodes University, South Africa, in his presentation “ Role of Regional Centers of Expertise (RCEs) and Universities in research and community engagements” described RCE as a vehicle for sustainable development promoted by the UNU to build a network of local platforms of multi-stakeholder engagement in ESD. He said there is need for researchers to start working across disciplines in order to aid ESD which is a goal of the RCE. He also stated that RCEs could function as bridges across historical and institutional divide. RCE should involve community-engaged research as well as being at the cutting edge of innovations/innovative research.

Abel Atiti of the United Nations University Institute of Advanced Studies (UNU-IAS) in his presentation “ Multi-stakeholder engagement and networking through UNU RCE initiative” challenged the universities that are not reaching out to the communities to start reaching out. He said that the RCEs should promote

partnerships across the region by involving the private sector and that RCE should translate DESD into regional realities. He encouraged the RCEs to engage their communities in research and also share their project experiences.

Prof Mustapha Zubairu of the Federal University of Technology, Minna in his presentation “Nigerian Universities and Community-engaged Research – An agenda for action” spoke on the economic values of the Jathropha plant, the implications of the housing problems on the urban poor, the use of local materials to provide low-cost houses and the redevelopment of the slums.

Dick Kachilonda, the coordinator of African RCEs, in his paper, “Challenges and opportunities for RCEs and Universities” highlighted some challenges as well as opportunities that confront our universities and RCEs. Some of the challenges include understanding of what RCEs are, limited interaction or communication among RCEs, lack of common interest, governance structure, less consultation and sharing of research project by universities. Some of the opportunities available to the RCEs include making joint proposals and collaborative research projects, showcasing RCE activities in other ESD forum, publication of RCE best practices, interaction with policy makers among others.

The UNESCO representative at the meeting “Revitalizing adult and youth literacy in nigeria: a precondition to achieving sustainable development” described literacy as key to achieving sustainable development. He stressed that despite Nigeria’s numerous problems, it has to work hard to ensure that it achieves its millennium development goals (MDGs) and that the RCE is a good vehicle to achieve the MDG.

2ND TECHNICAL SESSION (Chaired by Dr. Sadiya Daura)

The second session comprised of the presentation of case studies by the other African RCEs.

Edward Andama of the RCE Greater Eastern Uganda, in his presentation “Supporting community development through research and community engagement: The case of RCE, Greater Eastern Uganda” highlighted the approach used in actualizing their project to include sensitization workshops and seminars, promotion of membership, establishment of community outreach centers and support of community development through research.

The second case study was presented by Dr Saul Shava on “Community engagement and Research through heritage practices” emphasized on the need to engage the practices of the local community in research by the RCE.

The third case study, “The role of higher education in community-engaged research: A case of CHANCO community radio was presented by Dr. Marlene Chikuni showcased how community radio was used to communicate RCE activities to the inhabitants to solve environmental challenges. They used participative approach to involve the community. RCEs could use such approach to narrow the gap between experts and local communities.

The fourth presentation “RCE Swaziland Research and Innovation through community mushroom introduction project” by Isaac Dladla talked on the mushroom project and how the project trained locals to farm on mushroom, identify potential mushroom farmers by the use of “train the trainers” approach.

The fifth presentation “Mushroom and Spirulina as the answer to food and nutrition security among people living with HIV/AIDS” by Dr Gordon Nguka of

Kenya RCE spoke on the nutritional benefits of mushroom and spirulina and how these could be produced in commercial quantities. He also spoke on how these could boost CD4 count in people living with HIV/AIDS.

DAY 2

The second day began with the other African RCEs (Buea RCE in Cameroun, the Greater Nairobi RCE in Kenya and the Lusaka RCE in Zambia e.t.c) sharing their case stories on community engaged research. The session also reflected on the previous RCE meetings.

The meeting tried to seek ways of expanding RCEs in Africa and the participants made contributions as follows:

- That African RCEs could be expanded through communication and mobilization of people on the RCE objectives.
- That the universities should liaise with the National Universities Commission to expand RCEs in Nigeria.
- RCE would expose community based research and researchers to the outside world.
- The universities should submit applications for RCE membership.
- Language is a crucial factor in sustainable community development especially in education in effect culture has been identified as the first pillar of sustainable development
- To create awareness on what RCE is all about and the reason for it to be embraced

- The comprehensive list of all the participants at this 3rd African RCE meeting to be disseminated to all the participants for them to mobilize towards RCE membership.
- The process time for membership should be drastically reduced so as to encourage new registration.
- Sensitizing heads of universities and institutions in understanding what RCE is about, and that RCE cuts across disciplines
- Researches can be transformed.
- RCEs should look beyond the universities
- Africa needs to institutionalize the RCE so that African union can strengthen such initiatives
- There is need to strengthen the existing RCEs
- There are NGOs and government MDAs that are by nature partners with RCE, for example NEPAD, and that such partnership should be harnessed
- There is a need to make use of project driven approach to expand RCEs

Update of the upcoming global RCE conference in Nairobi was discussed.

On implementing collaborative research projects through RCEs, Universities who are on similar community based projects are encouraged to collaborate and pull resources together.

CHATTING THE WAY FORWARD ON AFRICAN RCE

The participants also suggested some ways forward for the African RCEs to include:

- i. To involve the communities, the local people, the NGOs, government MDAs and other stakeholders
- ii. To regularly organize in-country meetings to create opportunities for mentoring and brain-storming
- iii. Universities should review what their neighbours are doing and there is need to create an agency that will rate universities on how they impact on their host communities
- iv. Universities and RCEs should key into the vision and mission of the government who govern these communities.