

8TH AFRICAN RCE MEETING

The 8th African Regional Centres of Expertise was hosted by RCE Zomba, Malawi whose secretariat is based at Chancellor College, Faculty of Science. The meeting was attended by international and local participants from Nigeria (RCE Minna, RCE Zaria & RCE Greater Yenagoa), Kenya (RCE Greater Nairobi & RCE South Rift), Zambia (RCE Lusaka), Mozambique, Cameroon (RCE Buea), Uganda (RCE Greater Eastern Uganda), Eswatini (RCE Eswatini/Swaziland) and the host country Malawi (RCE Zomba). In addition, Prof Akpezi Ogbuigwe and Prof Mohamedbhai Goolamhussen who are African RCE advisers also attended the meeting. The meeting was supported by the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, Malawi Government, LEAD, University of Malawi and Malawi Environmental Endowment Trust. The theme of the three day meeting was: *Upscaling the Impact of African Regional Centres of Expertise in Actualising the Sustainable Development Goals*. This was to address the observed concern that the RCE concept is still not well understood by many stakeholders and hence not well supported. Consequently, delegates deliberated on challenges and opportunities in upscaling ESD activities, role of the Youth, media, academia, politicians and the private sector in upscaling RCE activities.

The meeting was officially opened by Mr Bright Kumwembe, Chief Director for Environmental and Climate Change Management. In his remarks he emphasized that education for sustainable development is at the centre for achieving sustainable development goals. Therefore he was grateful that Malawi was hosting the 8th African RCE meeting and encouraged the participants to translate knowledge into action. It is important that RCEs should share knowledge and best practices that will help to create solutions, promote behavior change and promote community participation that will help Africa to get out of the poverty trap. The chief director also emphasized that the youth to be engaged in dealing with issues of sustainable development for their own benefit. Behavior change can only come through transformative learning and hence curriculum reviews should take on board issues of educating the youth on sustainable development. Government of Malawi is willing to support and provide a conducive environment for learning and sharing knowledge that will sustain development of Malawi and African as a whole.

It was a lively conference with presentations on different topics including rehabilitation of ecosystems, governance, urbanization, youth participation and community engagement. There was also a session on Intergovernmental Platform on Biodiversity and Eco-systems Services (IPBES) which highlighted why Africa needs nature the key role of biodiversity in achieving SDGs in Africa. An excursion to sites demonstrating conservation agriculture as a way of adapting to climate change; weather data collection which extension workers use in disseminating information related to farming and use of improved cook stoves as a way of reducing deforestation concluded the conference on a practical note.

Key recommendations:

- The youth should take a leading role and learn to make sustainable decisions because Africa has a large youth population hence it is easy to establish rapport. Youths should be agents of change by making education for sustainable development fun for the young generation. There is also need for the youth in academia to reach out to the youth in rural areas and assist them to utilize the indigenous knowledge they have into actions that would actually transform the communities.
- There is need to establish collaboration among stakeholders within an RCE so that everyone should be on board. Some of the members could be a source of solutions to some of the challenges that are faced by RCEs.
- Struggling RCEs should be willing to learn from those that are thriving. For example RCE Minna has a good working relationship with policy makers and their youth section is vibrant, how do they do it?
- We should use our brains to bring solutions to the challenges we face. Africa solving her own problems with minimal outside intervention is a sustainable way of going about it rather than depending on external aid. Hence, curricula at all levels of education should mainstream sustainability issues.

Challenges

- There is no follow up on recommendations from past conferences i.e. it is difficult to engage membership after conferences. For example, even though it was agreed at the 7th Lusaka meeting that there was need for an RCE journal and an editorial board was duly constituted, there was no journal to show as a product during the 8th conference. Despite the call for papers, only three submissions had been made.
- Lack of resources for attending local and international meetings
- Limited information sharing and communication amongst RCEs
- There is no MOU for secretariat
- There is little national cognition of RCEs maybe because there are also African Centres of Excellence. For some people, Regional Centres of Expertise is somehow a misnomer

Opportunities / way forward

- Exploit existing linkages with UN organizations e.g. through UNESCO
- Exploit recognition & sponsorship from AU
- Lobby policy makers by illustrating relevance of RCE activities in promoting SDGs and Africa 2063 aspirations. There is need to engage both the opposition and ruling party when it comes to development issues.
- RCEs need to find programmes where projects can fit in and not vice versa (tag to other projects). This will ensure sustainability. There is also need to have tentacles to many

donors and identify different types of funding. Remember, opportunity lasts for the lifetime of that opportunity.

- Know where we want to go as a network otherwise we will not go anywhere. For example, if private sector can't come to us, then we visit them; can adopt a community and try to identify solutions to environmental challenges by developing a research proposal around them; can organize seminars or lectures and invite experts etc.
- Willingness to assist in editing the RCE journal.

Action points

- Submit papers from the 8th conference for consideration for publication in the RCE journal. Authors that presented during the conference were requested to submit full papers within 6 weeks after conference. Deadline is 14 September 2018. MEMBERS AGREED TO HAVE THE RCE JOURNAL UP AND RUNNING BY THE NEXT AFRICAN RCE CONFERENCE
- Emphasize on tree growing and not necessarily tree planting as a way of mitigating against deforestation.
- We should find sustainable ways of hosting conferences. There should be collaboration among sectors and not insist on territorialism.
- Explore ways of coming up with an RCE fund for supporting delegates to attend international meetings
- Create an RCE WhatsApp group for coordinators and Advisors
- Intensify online reporting
- Intensify efforts of community engagement

New secretariat

Elections for the new office bearers was conducted. RCE Minna and RCE Zomba (Abdul & Marlene) handed over the baton to RCE Buea & RCE Eswatini) to take African RCEs to greater heights. Congratulations Masango & Belusile!

The tentative host for the 9th African RCE conference will be announced early next year.

Conclusion

The 8th conference has increased visibility of RCE Zomba and the global RCE network in general. There is increased awareness among Malawians due to publicity through print and electronic media. Consequently, it has resulted in an interest to join RCE Zomba as well as formation of new RCEs in Malawi.

The Programme can be downloaded [here](#).

Presentations have been uploaded [here](#).

Photos have been uploaded [here](#).