Climate Change Position Paper

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For the 7th Global RCE Conference, the discussion group is asked to come up with a consensus decision on the following two points:

1. What are the key issues/challenges facing RCEs currently in the aspect of 'Climate Change'?

Awareness and acceptance of climate science varies depending on a RCE's location. In some parts of the world, climate change is generally accepted as a truth, while in others climate change is still obtusely denied. For instance, through work with RCE Tantramar in a rural region of North America it is clear that there remains a lack of understanding and acceptance with respect to the gravity of climate change.

It is essential that all people learn about climate change and that doubt concerning the legitimacy of climate science be dispelled. RCEs need to help educate their populations about transitioning to a low-carbon, sustainable system of production and consumption that will not further exacerbate climate change. In those areas where there exist major gaps in awareness, education should start with youth in school curricula – 1) because of the ease that a formal school system provides in reaching a large segment of the population and 2) the likelihood that what is taught in school will be disseminated further at home. To reach out to the rest of the population, RCEs need to also support community-focused education campaigns. It is important to have access to materials representing the messages of major reports (ex: IPCC) that are still accessible to the general public, and also to devise methods of presenting this information in a way that is appropriate to place and culture, presents a clear message with as little misunderstanding generated as possible, and leads to community discussion and community-owned action.

Further, as of 2012, climate change has already progressed to the point that it seriously affects people around the globe, though its effects are not homogeneous and specific issues/challenges facing RCEs largely depend upon the location of the RCE. For instance, RCE Tantramar is located in a small region of south-east New Brunswick, Canada, at the top of the Bay of Fundy, a body of water experiencing the highest tides in the world. The Tantramar region is buffered by a system of dykes originally built in the 16th century, which has been updated over time, but is still inadequate to protect against future flooding in the region as sea levels rise and the frequency of intense storm surges increases due to climate change. Many RCEs may be faced with similar circumstances, though not all. Even if our climate change challenges are not necessarily the same, an overriding theme exists for all RCEs: the need for education about projected impacts, preparation, and adaptation.

RCEs cannot work to usher in a more sustainable society without addressing the ways in which climate change will affect their regions. As “Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development”, RCEs need to be able to provide the expertise required for their communities to continue to develop sustainably in the face of climate change. To attain this type of expertise, RCEs need to be in communication with each other. A major challenge for RCEs is to determine the best courses of action for attaining sustainable development and adapting to climate change - this hasn't happened before, so it is essential that we share resources, research, and best practices within our global network to be able to best support our communities.

2. What are the top three things the group feels need to be discussed in person at the conference in Tongyeong?

1. Organizing communication and collaboration among RCEs with similar climate change challenges.

One of the greatest strengths of the RCE network is the variety of experience we can accumulate collectively and share. Innovative ideas and expertise can come from collaboration among RCEs dealing with similar climate change adaptation challenges. One of RCE Tantramar's major climate change challenges is the threat of flooding from rising sea levels. RCE Tantramar is keen to connect with and learn from other coastal RCEs dealing with similar climate change issues.

1. Strategies for inter-RCE sharing of climate change related educational materials, strategies, initiatives, etc.

Perhaps RCEs might consider the establishment of a searchable database/resource clearing-house of RCE generated lesson plans, workshops, community outreach programs, communication aides, etc. that can be accessible among RCEs to facilitate the sharing of best practices, inspire ideas for strategies and programs, and encourage the adoption of successful innovative ideas across regions.

1. How to integrate community and NGO efforts to address climate change with government policy responses.

RCE Tantramar is located in a region/country that lacks strong leadership on all government levels with respect to climate change prevention and adaptation. A major consideration for our RCE is how we can help bridge the gap between grass-roots initiatives focusing on adaptation to climate change and government action/policy-making. Can RCEs help to direct both to be mutually reinforcing? This is a balance we are navigating in our region. How can RCEs encourage progressive policy-making with respect to climate change in areas where political will is lacking on municipal/provincial/federal levels?