



The 13th Asia-Pacific RCE Regional Meeting Online Sessions

Report of the four online sessions

Overview

The 13th Asia-Pacific RCE Regional Meeting was hosted by RCE Kyrgyzstan, Arabaev Kyrgyz State University (AKSU), and the Faculty of Geography, Ecology and Tourism, with support from the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS). The Regional Meeting was split into 4 sessions, which were held fortnightly in September and October 2020 at the Faculty of Geography, Ecology and Tourism at the CACTLE Center and online. The theme and date of each session were as follows:

- 1st Session: Role of ESD during COVID-19 pandemic (10 September 2020)
- 2nd Session: Achievements and Collaborative Initiatives of RCEs of Asia-Pacific region in Response to COVID-19 (24 September 2020)
- 3rd Session: ESD as Learning and Empowerment – Revisiting the AP RCEs' Regional Action Plans (8 October 2020)
- 4th Session: Discussion on Emerging Asia Pacific RCEs' Collaborative Initiatives (22 of October 2020)

The disaggregated data of participants is listed in Table 1 below.

	Title	Gender	Nationality	RCEs	Participants
1 st session	21% Professors, 36% PhD, 29% Ms., 14% Mr.	53% women, 47% men	17 countries of the Asia-Pacific region and Canada	27 RCEs in the Asia-Pacific region	64 participants
2 nd session	16% Professors, 28% PhD, 16% Mr., 4% Mrs., 30% Ms.	62% women and 38% men	13 countries of the Asia-Pacific region and Canada	21 RCEs in the Asia-Pacific region and the remaining from AKSU	75 participants
3 rd session	13% Professors, 31% PhD, 16% Mr., 40% Ms.	64% women and 36% men	12 countries of the Asia-Pacific region and Canada	16 RCEs in the Asia-Pacific region	58 participants
4 th session	23% Professors, 45% PhD, 4% Associate Prof Dr, 23% Ms., 5% Madam	71% women and 29% men	13 countries of the Asia-Pacific region and Canada	18 RCEs in the Asia-Pacific region	55 participants

Table 1. List of participants



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Session 1: Role of ESD during COVID-19 pandemic

The goal of the 1st online session was to discuss the role of ESD during the COVID-19 pandemic and implement sustainable development principles in the Asia-Pacific region. RCE members and stakeholders discussed the response and possibilities of education for sustainable development during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The following issues were deliberated on: 1) COVID-19 Impact on Communities: What are the major impacts of the pandemic on local communities?; 2) What are the major challenges and opportunities in educational systems caused by COVID-19 pandemic?; 3) How ESD activities could help to mitigate COVID-19 impacts?

In the opening session, Dr. Chinara Sadykova from AKSU and RCE Kyrgyzstan welcomed the participants, followed by the opening remarks from Dr. Akio Takemoto, Programme Head of UNU-IAS, a video message from Professor Abdyrakhmanov Tolebek, Rector of AKSU, as well as a video message Ms. Kiyoka Miki, Director of Office of Environmental Education General Policy Division, Ministry of the Environment, Japan. Subsequently, Dr. Fumiko Noguchi, Research Fellow of UNU-IAS, described the history, aim and achievement of RCEs and reported on the progress of the Global Network of RCEs, which currently consists of 175 RCEs worldwide and 67 RCEs out of them are located in the Asia-Pacific region. Mr. Janne Leino, Vice Director of RCE Hangzhou, made a report on the results of the 12th Asia-Pacific RCE Regional Meeting which was held in June 2019 in Hangzhou, China.

Dr. Kiran Chhokar, Regional Advisor of the Asia Pacific RCEs served as the moderator of the panel discussion. The presentations were made by the representatives from UNU-IAS, UNESCO Bangkok, and three RCEs, including RCE Kyrgyzstan, RCE Okayama (Japan), and RCE Greater Gombak (Malaysia).

Professor Mario Tabucanon, UNU-IAS concluded Session 1 stating that the participants learned from the panel discussion the role of ESD during the COVID-19 pandemic and the RCEs responses. He appraised that the discussion was a manifestation that, indeed, ESD, both as a knowledge domain as well as an approach to learning, could be an effective tool for community engagement in times of pandemic and beyond. But in order for the RCE network to perform with efficacy, he emphasised the importance of practicing participative governance and management, wide collaboration among diverse stakeholders, transformative education, as well as ESD research and development. He reminded that strong individual RCEs were foundations to having vibrant regional and global RCE networks, where RCEs should play important role in building capacities on community competencies and awareness on ESD and SD, as well as in achieving the SDGs, are central to RCEs' mission.



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Session 2: Achievements and Collaborative Initiatives of RCEs of Asia-Pacific region in Response to COVID-19

This session was devoted to the short presentations of AP RCEs, hearing the voices of Asia-Pacific RCE participants on their activities, difficulties, and achievements in accordance with the questionnaire “RCE Response to COVID-19” (separately distributed). The A-P RCE community members discussed their activities, collaborative projects and problems solved while they faced COVID -19.

Dr. Noguchi presented the analysis of the questionnaire on “RCEs’ Response to COVID-19” which was distributed to the RCEs in the Asia-Pacific region in advance. The questionnaire consisted of 4 main questions, as following, 1) Impact of COVID-19 on the RCE’s local community; 2) Impact of COVID-19 on the RCE’s activities; 3) How have the RCE activities been affected by COVID-19 pandemic?: 4) Seeking the supporting mechanism for the RCE.

The RCE representatives that answered the questionnaire shared their experiences and lessons learned during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following 15 RCEs in the Asia-Pacific region made presentations: RCE Bohol (Philippines), RCE Chandigarh (India), RCE Dobong-Gu (Republic of Korea), RCE Greater Dhaka (Bangladesh), RCE Greater Gombak (Malaysia), RCE Greater Phnom Penh (Cambodia), RCE Jammu (India), RCE Kuching (Malaysia), RCE Northern Mindanao (Philippines), RCE Penang (Malaysia), RCE Srinagar (India), RCE Sundarbans (Bangladesh), RCE Tongyeong (Republic of Korea), RCE Cebu (Philippines), and RCE Otago (New Zealand).

Dr. Noguchi summarised the presentations that revealed the problems and challenges caused by the pandemic, including restrictions of movement and travel, suspension of planned activities, including outreach activities to community people and stakeholders. She highlighted the important role of RCEs in the pandemic that identified the local issues, in particular, the ones of the socially and economically vulnerable communities and responded those with closely working with diverse stakeholders such as government, youth and schools while dealing with the challenges of funding discontinuity and accessibility of the activity site. She also pointed the digitalisation as one of the emergent issues that should be further discussed, particularly on how to deal with the areas, people and knowledge that were being left behind in digitalisation of activities.

Prof. Tabucanon, made a concluding remark, reminding the RCE movement was about translating global sustainable development agenda into local actions and responding to pressing community needs through ESD. He reemphasized the current global problem, the devastating pandemic, that pushed the world back a century ago. He called the RCE community to respond



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to the situation. He acknowledged that the RCEs worked on wide-ranging initiatives to mitigate the impact of COVID-19.

Lastly, Prof. Tabucanon added some takeaways that could be drawn from RCEs' experiences to help the RCE community work further towards shaping future actions and policymaking influence in the following three points. Firstly, the impact of COVID-19, both in scope and scale, has been uneven across countries and regions, which shows that policy, strategy, and socio-economic infrastructure vary from country to country, from region to region. Secondly, it may be possible to convert elements of the crisis into an opportunity for recovering better, known as "build-back-better" scheme of things. This can be done by gearing policy interventions toward the strengthening of human and planetary resilience and directing much of the resources earmarked for a recovery toward investment in promoting the SDGs. Thirdly, while the pandemic's impact on many prosperity-related SDG targets is negative, its impact on many planet-related SDG targets has been positive; greenhouse gas emissions declined, air and water quality improved, and a process of regeneration of nature could be witnessed in many areas. This demonstrates yet again that the current ways of achieving prosperity are in conflict with the health of the planet. The decoupling of prosperity and environmental degradation is still beyond grasp, and global efforts must be accelerated to attain Green Economy.

Session 3: ESD as Learning and Empowerment, Revisiting the Asia-Pacific RCEs Regional Action Plans

This session aimed to revisit the Asia-Pacific Regional Action Plans and take into consideration current and emerging issues including the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, among others, in dealing with economic impacts of COVID-19 pandemic - such as skill development for learning and empowerment of people who ran out of work due to pandemic.

After the welcoming remarks made by Dr. Chinara Sadykova, RCE Kyrgyzstan/AKSU, Prof. Mario Tabucanon, UNU-IAS, revisited the action plans, reviewed the past agenda and introduced the two sessions.

The first two sessions of the 13th Asia-Pacific RCE Regional Meeting provided an overview of the pressing issues of the present, particularly the COVID-19 impact on communities and the role of RCEs on ESD in response to the pandemic. Session 3 focused on the future and updating action plans. As in past Asia-Pacific RCE Regional Meetings, a template for individual RCE action plans for a timeframe of one year, containing action items or projects, target SDGs, ESD for 2030 dedicated Priority Action Areas, and their respective activities over the next year in quarterly periods, was disseminated prior to the meeting. Individual RCEs shared their plans, identified similarities and common challenges, and revisited and updated the regional-level Action Plans that have evolved during the recent years. There were two sectoral discussions



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held in sequence, namely (1) Higher Education & Community Engagement; and (2) Schools and Youth & Community Engagement. After the two sectoral discussions, a general discussion took place. But the discussions on visioning of the Asia-Pacific RCEs future did not end in this session. The outputs of this session and of the two previous sessions were fed into the next session, Session 4, for further conceptualization of ideas into potential, actionable regional collaborative projects according to priority thematic areas.

(1) Higher Education & Community Engagement

Moderator: Prof. Munirah Ghazali, RCE Penang

Rapporteur: Dr. Zainal Abidin Bin Sanusi, RCE Greater Gombak

(2) Schools and Youth & Community Engagement

Moderator: Ms. Brittany Hardiman, RCE Greater Western Sydney

Rapporteur: Ms. Suyeon Park, RCE Tongyeong

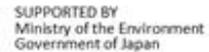
The following RCEs shared their action plans during the discussion:

- RCE Greater Gombak
- RCE Kuching
- RCE Srinagar
- RCE Tongyeong
- RCE Southern Vietnam
- RCE Greater Western Sydney

In the projects for youths, the main target was university students as well as youth groups and clubs in the community, while the projects for schools focused on teachers, students, and the whole-school system. In the activities of RCEs, the aspect of the above-mentioned elements, namely higher education, community engagement, school & youth are interlinked in RCE's integrated approaches through multi-stakeholder partnership towards achieving sustainable development in local communities. During the discussion, the following points were highlighted: capacity building for citizens and teachers; strengthening impact on school systems and policymaking; re-orientation of the school curriculum; and empowerment and capability building for youth.

The ideas of collaborative projects identified in the discussion were as follows:

- Networking and strengthening the involvement of youths: Strengthening the RCE youth network through identifying RCE Youth Focal Point in each RCE and inviting more youths to join it. More youths should be encouraged to join var
- Capacity building for teachers and schools: creating ESD curriculum and/or MOOCs that can be shared with RCEs in the region (RCE Tongyeong is interested in it.)



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- Capacity building for youth: Youths in RCEs are motivated to participate in the programme entitled “RCE SDG Youth Challenge”, in which they will conduct their own localized SDG projects. The RCE Greater Western Sydney, the organizer of this programme is seeking youth coordinators to assist with the programme in 2021 and beyond.
- Joint research on common ESD/SD issues among RCEs

Session 4: Discussion on Emerging Asia Pacific RCEs' Collaborative Initiatives

The 4th session aimed to discuss about possible RCEs' collaborative projects. The focus was on the following questions: 1. How RCEs members through their thematic collaborative activities could enrich the Agenda 2030?; 2. What RCEs network should function to support and advance ESD activities of RCEs and beyond the network?

After the welcoming remarks made by Dr. Sadykova, Dr. Noguchi made a summing-up report on the previous three sessions to remind the relevance of RCEs to global ESD policies in Session 1, RCEs response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Session 2 and the RCE strategies for the key sectors such as youth, school and local communities in Session 3. After explaining the aim of Session 4 that focused on the RCEs strategy by themes, she provided some insights which could be considered at Session 4 discussion, reemphasizing the role of ESD in local communities, the meaning of ‘participation’, the wise and effective way of digitalisation, the importance of policy advocacies and networking and lastly the role of the RCE Global Service Centre.

The 4th session consisted of the following two thematic groups:

(1) **Circular Economy, New Livelihood Opportunities**

Moderator: Dr. Zinaida Fadeeva

Rapporteur: Dr. Jeeranuch Sakkhamduang, RCE Greater Phnom Penh

(2) **Climate Change, Disaster Risk Reduction, Biodiversity Conservation and Wellbeing**

Moderator: Dr. Abdhesh Kumar Gangwar, RCE Srinagar

Rapporteur: Dr. Betsan Martin, RCE Waikato

AP RCE members identified and suggested the following themes about which collaborative projects can be developed. It was suggested that the emerging project concept would be coordinated by one Convenor. The tentative themes and people who volunteered to be the Convenors are as follows:



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- Governance and Policy
- Sustainable agriculture
- Green campus/ Sustainable environment (Prof. Dr. Munirah Ghazali, RCE Penang)
- Indigenous and local communities (RCE Greater Gombak)
- Mangroves (Dr. Jeeranuch Sakkhamduang, RCE Greater Phnom Penh)
- Water (Fresh water, rivers, plastic pollution, water quality and pollution, riverine communities, tourism & homestays around water bodies etc.) (RCE Kuching)
- Youth (Ms. Brittany Hardiman, RCE Greater Western Sydney)
- Disaster Risk Reduction Preparedness (Dr. Abdhesh Kumar Gangwar, RCE Srinagar)

In the discussion it was decided that the Convenors prepare a 1-page note on their themes for further follow up. It is suggested that the one-pager contains the following items:

1. Topic of the proposed collaborative project
2. Objectives
3. Methodology
4. Plan of Actions with timelines
5. Expected outputs
6. Coordinating RCE, and participating RCEs

(Note: Once available the concept notes will serve as Annex to this Final Report)

Prof Tabucanon of the Global RCE Service Centre moderated the discussion on “Role of the Asia-Pacific RCEs Coordinating Committee”, reminding participants of the purpose and functions of the Committee which have proved beneficial to strengthening the collaborative undertakings of the Asia-Pacific RCE Community. The current and outgoing members of the Committee were gratefully acknowledged for their valuable service during 2019-2020 under the Convenorship of Dr. Abdhesh Kumar Gangwar (RCE Srinagar) and Rapporteurship of Ms. Jen Dollin (RCE Greater Western Sydney). After a presentation on the selection process based on past accepted practice, a new Committee was formed for the term 2021-2022 comprising of the following members:

- RCE Greater Western Sydney (subject to confirmation)
- RCE Okayama
- RCE Srinagar
- RCE Tongyeong
- RCE Yogyakarta
- RCE Kyrgyzstan
- RCE Penang
- RCE Waikato
- RCE Greater Phnom Penh
- RCE Greater Gombak
- RCE Sundarbans
- RCE Hyogo-Kobe



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Ms. Jen Dollin was nominated and appointed as Convenor and Ms. Brittany Hardiman (both RCE Greater Western Sydney) as Rapporteur for the Committee's 2021-2022 term (subject to confirmation).

RCE Kyrgyzstan & AKSU will organize the second part of the 13 Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting in-person in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in 2021.

Dr. Sadykova and Ms. Kanykey Djumanalieva of RCE Kyrgyzstan made concluding remarks. RCE Kyrgyzstan expressed their gratitude to UNU-IAS for their support and advice in conducting the 4 online sessions of the 13th AP RCE Regional Meeting. Also, their appreciation was extended to AKSU Rector and Dean of geography faculty for their support and participation in the sessions. RCE Kyrgyzstan acknowledges all AP RCE members who attended the sessions and the contributions they made.