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13th African RCE Regional Meeting

Fostering Pan-African Collaboration for Just Futures

REPORT ON THE EVENT AND THE ROAD AHEAD

Draft by Dr. Jim Taylor, Mr. Preven Chetty, Ms. Belusile Mhlanga and Prof. Tsepo Mokuku

OVERVIEW

The 13th African Regional Meeting on *Fostering Pan-African Collaboration for Just Futures* was hosted online on Thursday, 17 August 2023, by RCE Makana and Rural Eastern Cape, RCE Lesotho, RCE Eswatini and RCE KwaZulu-Natal. Face-to-face attendance by members of the various RCEs for some participants. Being able to meet and share ideas outside the formal programme, over a cup of tea, proved to be helpful. Such hidden curriculum possibilities are often underestimated in social change processes.

Considerable efforts were made for advertising and optimizing networking to ensure that the 13th African Regional Meeting was well publicized and widely known about. Support from the UNU-IAS team proved invaluable in this regard. The organisers engaged with the registrants before the event and developed the programme while considering their special needs and suggestions. This approach also facilitated the development and inclusion of key topics requested or suggested by registered participants. This pre-meeting interaction proved invaluable to the success of the event and for fostering incredible relationship building. The fact that only 36 percent of the 223 registrants are directly affiliated to an RCE is an enormous growth prospect for the RCE movement!

The Regional Meeting proceedings were recorded and made available by RCE Makana and Rural Eastern Cape. Please find the link to the videos [here](#) (Link to YouTube).

FEEDBACK ON THE RCE MEETING:

Thank you so much Jim and Team SA/Lesotho/ Eswatini RCEs. You have shown the light on how African RCEs can lead the way. Prof. Akpezi Obuigwe - Nigeria.

Thanks, Heila for the updates. GEEP is looking forward to such collaboration and partnerships. I am glad you mentioned EEASA. We can make a huge impact in the region and continent. Thank you. Prof. M.J. Ketlhoilwe - Botswana.

BACKGROUND & THEMATIC FOCUS

Today, humanity is struggling to find ways of living that are not dependent on fossil fuels. The cultural landscapes of Africa and indigenous practices of those times hold many keys to sustainable living. Citizens and scientists are seeking the wisdom of the past so that it may be linked to the wisdom of the present with the goal of more sustainable futures we so urgently need.

The 13th RCE African Regional Meeting had a Just Transitions focus. Themes include Water, Indigenous Heritage, Citizen Science and Handprint CARE. Handprint CARE is about learning to look after others, to best care for each other and to explore change projects to improve the surroundings that we all share. The quest is to enable the just transitions the world urgently needs.

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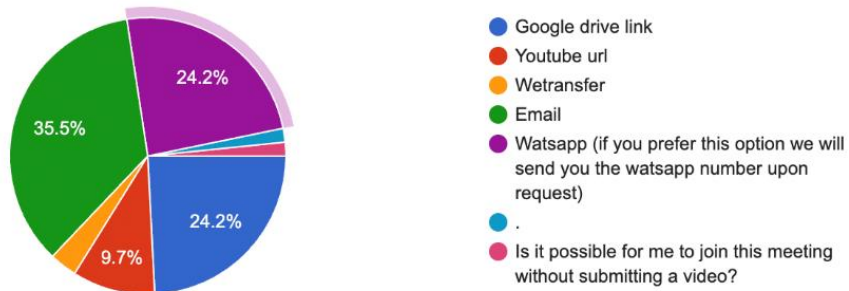
THE MEETING REGISTRANTS & THEIR PROFILES

The following graphs provide an overview of the participant (registrants) themes of interest and demographics. More than 80 percent of the participants (registrants) were from Africa.

Please indicate how you would share your short video with us

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62 responses

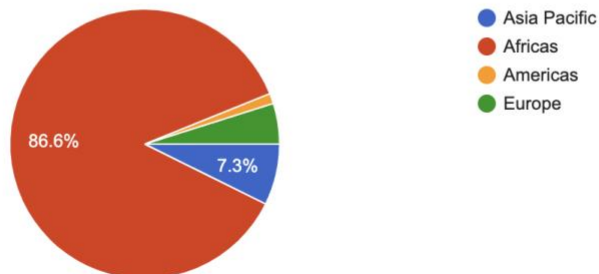


Untitled Section

Which region is your RCE located in?

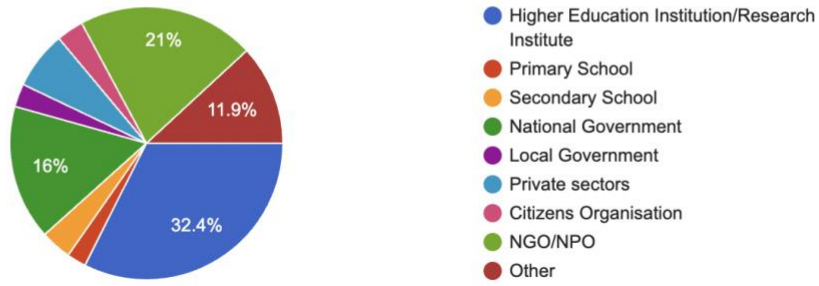
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82 responses



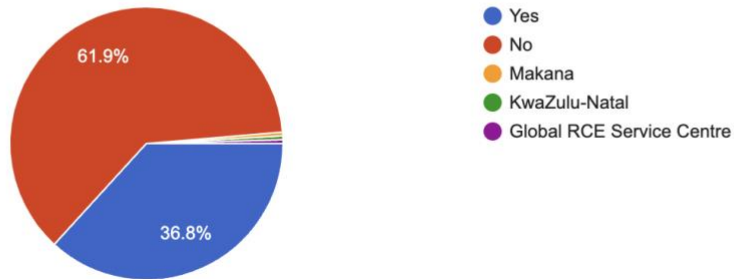
To which type of organisations does your organisation belong?

219 responses



If you are affiliated to an RCE?

223 responses



SESSION ONE: How is ESD supporting collaboration for Just Futures

Welcome Remarks and Introduction

Dr Jim Taylor from RCE KwaZulu-Natal welcomed all participants to the meeting. He then introduced the partner host RCEs represented by Prof Tsepo Mokuku (RCE Lesotho), Belusile Mhlanga (RCE Eswatini) and Preven Chetty (RCE Manaka and Rural Eastern Cape).

Opening Remarks

Dr Jonghwi Park (Head of Innovation and Education Programme, UNU-IAS) then delivered the opening remarks emphasising the importance of the RCE movement to strive towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and implementing the ESD for 2030 framework. She expressed her appreciation to the host RCEs, participants and to the Ministry of the Environment of Japan for their continued support in advancing RCE initiatives for about two decades.

A Message from GermanWatch

Mr. Stefan Rostock (GermanWatch) presented on 'ESD Today – Youth activism and Handprints', He highlighted the significance of youth collaboration across the globe on equal terms and presented practical projects such as HandPrints for sustainability. This set the stage for the subsequent breakout session on HandPrints for sustainability. (Please refer to the website for more details about the HandPrints initiative. https://www.handprint.in/the_handprint_idea)

Congratulatory Remarks from Ministry of the Environment of Japan Mr. Reiji Higashioka (Director, Ministry's Secretariat, Ministry of Environment, Japan) offered congratulatory remarks. He sincerely praised African RCEs' involvement and host RCEs' notable contributions, stressing RCEs' role in local-level ESD and sustainable development via multi-stakeholder networks. He emphasized youth's vital role in achieving sustainability and the significance of their engagement.

Updates from Global RCE Service Centre

Ms. Miki Konishi (Programme Coordinator, Innovation and Education Programme, UNU-IAS) outlined recent and upcoming Global RCE Network initiatives. She mentioned 4 new RCEs, including RCE Mogadishu, acknowledged in 2023, expanding the community to 190 RCEs globally. Ms. Konishi discussed planned events, a publication on sustainable consumption and production, a new research project on 'Action-oriented Pedagogies for ESD,' and youth-led efforts like the RCE Youth Webinar and RCE Youth Art Challenge.

Updates from the African Regional Youth Coordinator

Mr. Evance Ouya (Africa Regional Youth Coordinator) of RCE South Rift delivered an inspiring talk on youth initiatives in the African Region and worldwide. He highlighted the vital role of youth engagement within the RCE movement, emphasising its significance. Moreover, he stressed the pivotal role of youth participation in the overarching pursuit of ESD 2030.

Youth led South/North Partnerships for Sustainable Futures

Mr. Ayanda Lepheana from GroundTruth is working with Youth-led South/North Partnerships for Sustainable Futures. He showcased the work in Mphopomeni and how the concept of the Enviro-Champs is spreading to other parts of South Africa and even beyond. The recent partnerships with the Presidential Employment Stimulus (PES) and UNICEF are most encouraging and promising.

Community-based water monitoring

Prof. Tsepo Mokuku (National University of Lesotho) is the Chairperson of RCE Lesotho and is based in the capital city, Maseru. His work with students on community-based development, especially the project related to water and water quality, is widely known. One of his students, Ms. Francis Lenonya is a teacher and community leader in citizen science and biomonitoring. Please see the details of the project on the website (<https://minisass.org/en/>).

Collaboration through the Global Environmental Programme (GEEP) - Africa Hub strategic plan 2023

Ms. Cindy-Lee Cloete from the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) presented about the Global Environmental Education Programme (GEEP). Her presentation included the Africa Hub strategic plan for 2023 which was compiled by Prof. MJ Ketlhoilwe from University of Botswana.

ESD – Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures Prof. Heila Lotz-Sistka (Rhodes University Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC)) stressed the important role of the New Social Contract in reorientating to Education for Sustainable Development. She also shared some teacher support programmes, such as *'Fundisa for Change'* and *'Sustainability Starts with Teachers'* a teacher capacity building programme which is offered by UNESCO spanning 11 nations across southern Africa.

Panelist Responses

Prof. Rob O'Donoghue, Prof. Akpezi Obugwe, and Ms. Belusile Mhlanga shared their reflections. They underscored the inclusive essence of the diverse ESD programmes previously discussed. Ms Mhlanga particularly emphasized the pivotal role of youth engagement and involvement. These invaluable inputs were fed into the breakout sessions.

SESSION TWO: Africa RCE update and collaborative topics

Session Two focused on the Africa & International RCE Roundup. It involved sharing video messages from African RCEs and three videos from RCEs in the other regions.

Each of the 8 videos emphasized:

- Who were they and what their key focus was?
- What are their creative innovations?
- How are they able to collaborate more widely with other RCE's?

The international videos included one from RCE Scotland, highlighting collaboration within the ESD field as well as from RCE Saskatchewan, Canada, showcasing the COMMEET Anti-Racism Toolkit with relevance to addressing issues like racism and colonialism in Africa. Lastly, a video from RCE Belarus spotlighted youth-led actions for sustainability including litter clean-ups.

SESSION THREE: Breakout sessions

All registered participants were invited to select one of the six suggested break-out room topics. These topics were collaboratively curated with the participants via a Google Docs topic generation process managed by Mr. Preven Chetty at RCE Makana and Rural Eastern Cape. Given the limitations of the Webinar format in accommodating break-out groups, the participants were offered Zoom links so that they could select their preferred break-out room. Each break-out room was supported by a facilitator as well as a GroundTruth (an RCE KwaZulu-Natal partner) technical person. Each break-out room was also provided with a Miro board to record proceedings.

Break-out Room Topics

No.	Topic	Facilitators
1	Citizen Science and community mobilization	Mr. Ayanda Lepheana
2	HandPrints for Sustainability	Prof. Rob O'Donoghue & Ms. Caroline Clover
3	Indigenous Heritage Practices	Prof. Tsepo Mokuku & Mr. Zaniel April
4	Fund Raising	Dr. Abdul Husaini & Ms. Tanisha Curtis
5	Freedom and Learning with a Youth Focus	Mr. Evance Ouya & Mr. Nkosi Sithole
6	Sustainable Community Development	Ms. Charlene Russell

Interim facilitators were then appointed, and they helped manage the groups, each with a technical support person from GroundTruth, a partner organisation for RCE KwaZulu-Natal.

Each working group will further communicate to develop concrete collaborative initiatives. The ongoing activities and collaboration ideas for Working Groups 1 and 2 are presented below.

Working Group 1: RCE's and Citizen Science in Support of ESD

Monitoring water can no longer be the domain of scientists alone. In this regard citizen science is proving a popular human mobilising activity. In Denmark alone there are over 200 000 registered volunteer citizen scientists! South Africa's biomonitoring programme, the Stream Assessment Scoring System (www.minisass.org) produces a live database, on Google Earth, with all rivers and streams classified on a five-point scale from Blue (good condition, unmodified) to very poor condition – highly modified). miniSASS costs nothing to use, very little equipment is needed, and the outcomes are immediate. Indeed, this methodology is recommended by the UN Committee responsible for SDG 6. miniSASS is most useful for SDG 6.3.2 and SDG 6B and can be applied world-wide. Any method like this can be studied further, marketed more widely and better understood. With the help of UNICEF, we are currently upgrading the miniSASS website.

Linked to miniSASS this project is supported by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and CGIAR. In addition to supporting Enviro-Champs activities across South Africa this project is developing machine learning to strengthen the biomonitoring algorithms that support miniSASS. A miniSASS phone App has been developed and this is currently being developed and improved.

Working Group 2: RCE collaborative towards a Handprints for Change online course

The YouTube opens with the three linked focus areas that came out for collaboration across RCEs:

1. The review of change project work to identify African exemplars as sources of inspiration for Handprint action learning.
2. The development of a learning platform of African heritage materials in relation to sustainability concerns. (Proposed by RCE Makana and Rural and KZN)
3. The development, monitoring and evaluation of an online Handprints short course.

The proposed online Handprints course will be developed to support:

- Curriculum activated ESD for learner-led work in school-in-community settings. (Interim convener - Rob)
- Youth activated ESD towards more just and sustainable livelihood practices. (Interim convener - Stefan)

To play the YouTube report and concept proposal for the online course and its provisional evaluation framework please click on the link below.

CEE Handprint training design video
youtu.be

As a follow-up, the participants were asked to provide the name and email contact for a Handprints liaison person from each interested RCE to Rob O'Donoghue at r.odonoghue@ru.ac.za.

Breakout Sessions' Wrap-up

Following the break-out sessions, each group summarized their discussions and outlined potential pathways for future endeavors. Notably, certain facilitators have initiated communication with their respective groups to map out forthcoming initiatives. The working group on 'HandPrints for Sustainability', are embarking on some quite ambitious projects facilitated by Prof. Rob O'Donoghue of the Rhodes ELRC.

Concluding Remarks

Ms. Miki Konishi from UNU-IAS and Dr. Jim Taylor and Mr. Preven Chetty from the host RCEs of this meeting delivered the concluding Remarks emphasising the power of collaboration and the way forward.

CLOSING THANKS AND GRATITUDE

The above examples are just two snapshots of outcomes that went further or were developed during the 13th African RCE meeting. Of most significance is how many capacity-building programmes in ESD are underway. These include teacher programmes spanning 11 African countries as well as training programmes that can be undertaken online or in person. Courses relate to teacher training, wetlands, biomonitoring, HandPrints for sustainability to mention a few.

As the organisers of the Regional Meeting, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the participants who contributed to the event. Their involvement before, during, and after the meeting exemplified the truly continuous and ongoing nature of RCE's collaborative efforts and endeavour.

Lastly, the host RCEs would like to extend a profound thank you to UNU-IAS team for all their support. Their contribution significantly enhanced the programme and underscored the significance of the outcomes achieved.