

11th Global RCE Conference: Education for the Sustainable Development Goals
7-9 December, 2018, Cebu, the Philippines



Plenary II

Keynote Speech: 'RCE Engagement in National and International Sustainability Processes'

7 December, 2018, Cebu, the Philippines

Presenter: Dr. Mee Young Choi (Head of Education Unit, UNESCO Jakarta)

Prof. Mario Tabucanon (UNU-IAS), the chair of Plenary Session II, introduced the presenter for this session, a distinguished representative from the UNESCO Jakarta Office, Dr. Mee Young Choi, Programme Specialist and Head of the Education Unit. As the lead agency in implementing the SDGs globally, Prof. Tabucanon noted that UNESCO's Jakarta office not only represents the Philippines but other countries in Southeast Asia.

Dr. Choi began by introducing UNESCO and its presence in the region, including two regional offices by way of Jakarta and Bangkok. She then ran through the Education Programmes for 2018-2019 her office runs, and noted their linkage with RCE activities, before presenting UNESCO's ESD definition, which stresses empowerment; ESD can be broad, but ultimately it aims at people's empowerment in the field. UNESCO's role therefore includes global leadership, coordination and implementation, technical support, and monitoring.

In terms of global leadership, Dr. Choi spoke about UNESCO's role as the leading agency for ESD, and explained ESD's response to global challenges and sub-regional challenges in Southeast Asia, with challenges including government ownership, integration into the education system, unclear targets and indicators, and budget constraints. She then went through the recommendations for RCE Engagement in National and International Sustainability Processes in GAP and SDG 4.7, based on their field office's experiences. She explained that the role of RCEs is to bring evidence to formulate into policy processes. Not only are institutional changes needed, but individual changes are needed too. One of the greatest achievements of RCEs is advocacy. Dr. Choi then spoke about a publication, *Education for Sustainable Development Goals: Learning Objectives*, which provides guidance on how to address the SDGs, and includes recommendations and examples, to learn how to integrate it into RCE programs. Education is the foundational basis for the SDGs, and intertwined rather than separated.

Dr. Choi closed her presentation speaking about her career over the last three decades. She began as a teacher, caring for students coming from poor families. Through this experience, she became interested in how she could provide them with free lunches. However, she felt powerless, as she wanted to change policy, change the system, but didn't have any power.

Following this, she began to study, and became a researcher, which led to her becoming a policy researcher, after which she then moved to UNESCO. She is now contributing to changing the system. Through this experience, she realised that she was not in a powerless position at first, it was just that she did not realise how to affect change. Every institution and every person has a different position. RCEs have their role, to change things together.

Prof. Tabucanon thanked Dr. Choi for providing an overview of the role of UNESCO in the ESD movement, strategies, gaps, and possible entry points for RCEs, and about her experiences in regards to the various challenges in the region, which are applicable to other regions. As time was limited, Prof. Tabucanon asked one question on the audience's behalf: 'If an RCE wants to connect with UNESCO, what is the protocol, can you give an idea on the process involved?'. Dr. Choi responded that every UNESCO member state has a national commission for UNESCO, and that it is advised to go through these. She also mentioned that from her experience, she found that people are afraid to contact field offices directly, however that is what the field offices exist for. She also expressed that letters can also be sent, and any RCEs wishing to do so should state which RCE they are from, what they are interested in, and what they would like to work with, with a process that follows for such requests. She also noted that UNESCO has a six-year workplan, and that for those interested, it is important to know when the cycle begins.