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RCE Bulletin

R C E D E V E L O P M E N T

Strengthening Communities of Practice through RCEs in Southern Africa

by Jim Taylor

Overview: Representatives from 4 South African Development Community (SADC) countries worked together in 2007 to develop the concept of RCEs in their respective countries. This work was conceptualized as part of, and parallel to, the World Environmental Education Congress held in Durban in July 2007, and focused on promoting Education for Sustainable Development. Representatives from RCE member organizations included Mandla Mlipha from the University of Swaziland (UNISWA), Clement Tikiwa from the Dept. of Environmental Affairs in Malawi, Aristides Baloi from the Dept. of Geography, Universidade Eduardo Mondlane (UEM), Mozambique, and Jim Taylor from the SADC Regional Environmental Education Programme (SADC-REEP). The development of the RCEs has been strongly supported by Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA), the United Nations University and UNESCO.

An RCE Action Plan: The progress towards establishing an RCE in Malawi, Swaziland, South Africa and Mozambique has been steady and thorough. The concept was first discussed at the Mainstreaming Education for Development workshop in Nairobi, Kenya (4-9 May 1996) and was followed up with a public participation process in each country and a wider process through the Environmental Education Association of Southern Africa (EEASA). Zinaida Fadeeva, an ESD expert from UNU-IAS, hosted a workshop at the EEASA conference in Zimbabwe in 2006.

Delegates later met at Rhodes University from the 21-23 May 2007 to discuss and further develop the concept of RCEs in their respective countries. A number of follow-up deliberations were then held at the World Environmental Education Congress in Durban from 2-6 July 2007. A highlight of this congress was when delegates attended a small, informal ceremony when the KwaZulu-Natal RCE was acknowledged by the United Nations University at Umgeni Valley in Howick.

The Penang meeting and ESD challenges in the SADC region: Representatives from Malawi, Mozambique and Swaziland later attended the International RCE Conference held in Penang, Malaysia in early August 2007, as candidate RCEs, to enable them to develop their ideas further and develop networking and collaborative plans with other RCEs worldwide. ESD challenges faced in each of the SADC countries include poverty, food and nutrition vulnerability as well as a range of environmental degradation issues such as alien invader plants and animals, soil erosion, water and air pollution to mention a few. A further challenge in the SADC region is the difference in language across the region. Creative approaches are needed to bridge these gaps and in some areas enviro-picture building is being explored as methodology where pictures lead practitioners to text and further graphic demonstrations of environmental risk (Share-Net 2007). Such approaches enable participants to engage with and clarify enhanced perspectives when coping with environmental issues and risks.

Other efforts to address language related challenges include efforts by Mozambique to collaborate with an RCE in Portugal, the RCE CREIAS-OESTE where Prof. Jose Matos Silva and Dr. Suhita Osorio Peters are working towards collaborative approaches to addressing environmental issues. Further meaningful and carefully thought out ESD processes are needed to address all the above challenges.

Conclusion: Swaziland, Malawi and Mozambique are now RCE candidate projects. Developing communities of practice, as described by Wenger and associates, is certainly contributing to greater collaboration and participation in ESD in southern Africa:

"Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis. ... These people do not necessarily work together every day, but they meet because they find value in their interactions. As they spend time together, they typically share information, insight and advice. They help each other to solve problems. They discuss their situations, their aspirations and needs. They ponder common issues, explore ideas and act as sounding boards ... they accumulate knowledge, they become

informally bound by the value they find in learning together. This value is not merely instrumental for their work."

(Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002: 4&5)

The vision for the RCE processes in the SADC region is well summed up in the recent Ahmedabad declaration:

"Our vision is a world in which our work and lifestyles contribute to the well-being of all life on Earth. We believe that through education, human lifestyles can be achieved that support the ecological integrity, economic and social justice, sustainable livelihoods and respect for all life."

(Centre for Environmental Education, November 2007, Ahmedabad, India).

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References

The Ahmedabad Declaration 2007: A Call to Action. Education for life; life through education. The Centre for Environmental Education, Ahmedabad, India.

Windows on our World (WOW): Enviro-picture building as a creative activity to overcome language and conceptual barriers in southern Africa. Share-Net (2007), Howick.

Cultivating Communities of Practice: a guide to managing knowledge. Wenger, E., McDermott, R. & Snyder, W. (2002), Harvard Business School Press, Boston.

Consultation to set up RCE thematic group on health

A first consultative meeting to set up the RCE working group on the theme of Health and Sustainability was held on 21 November at the Yokohama City University, Yokohama, Japan. The Yokohama City University representing RCE Yokohama, the RCE Global Service Centre and RCE Penang represented by Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) participated in this meeting.

It was agreed that RCE Penang would take the lead in the thematic group and look into organizing a meeting of 5-7 RCEs who are interested in the issue. This first meeting is to be organized by USM in April 2008. The meeting builds towards broader intra-RCE collaboration on sustainable health, community and education. The UNU International Institute for Global Health (UNU-IIGH) based in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, and UNU-IAS are expected to support this first strategic meeting of RCEs working on the topic.

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First European RCE meeting

Thirty-two representatives from 18 RCEs and prospective RCEs met in Malmö, Sweden, on December 13 and 14. After a Fair Trade Lunch, a welcome by Deputy Vice-Chancellor Harriet Axelsson, Malmö University, and presentations of all the 18 regions, a working session on common links and potential collaboration took place. Jos Rikers from RCE Rhine-Meuse and Adam Cade from East Midlands opened the discussion on potential collaboration among RCEs in Europe. In a parallel session Prof. Charles Hopkins gave support for new RCEs. Financial issues, communication and evaluation were discussed after three useful presentations by Mags Liddy from RCE Ireland, Adam Cade from RCE East Midlands and Jos Hermans from RCE Rhine-Meuse. A number of working groups on further collaboration on different topics were created before the close of the meeting.



Participants at the European RCE conference

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RCE workshop on evaluation at the Conference of Environmental Education

A workshop for RCEs was held on 25 November during the 4th International Conference on Environmental Education in Ahmedabad. At the workshop, it was noted that "the RCE process may be the grandest experiment in social learning around the world today."

Participants at the workshop discussed an evaluation process for the RCE initiative. While RCEs are encouraged to provide regular reports on their progress and future plans, clarity on the structure and time-scale of reports is still being sought. It was agreed that an evaluation process could help develop reporting guidelines and time-frames.

The evaluation is expected to be an open and consultative process involving all RCEs and their partners who wish to participate, would seek to mobilize descriptions of practice and encourage reflection and would be responsive to the immediate needs of the RCEs. It is hoped that evaluation will open up learning spaces for participants.

A pilot questionnaire has already been tested with 12 RCEs, and is soon to be revised based on feedback. As a next step, the development of an evaluation tool-kit will be explored to help provide a mechanism for RCEs to articulate their strategy.

Facilitation of the evaluation process and sharing of preliminary findings is expected to happen at regional RCE meetings.

For more information

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Asian University representatives work on charter to promote SD

At a two-day meeting held on the 19 and 20 November at UNU-IAS in Yokohama, representatives of several leading Asian universities finalized and committed to adopt a charter to work together to integrate sustainable development into postgraduate courses and curricula.

The adoption of the charter formalizes the creation of ProSPER.Net: the Promotion of Sustainability in Postgraduate Education and Research Network. This new network comprises academic institutions in the Asia-Pacific region with strong education and research programmes as well as aspiring innovators in sustainable development and related fields, and who offer postgraduate courses in these fields.

ProSPER.Net will serve as a platform of collaboration for members to pursue postgraduate education and research on sustainable development and, specifically, on ESD. The network's activities will include:

- annual colloquia to discuss experiences in postgraduate education and research on sustainable development,
- a summer school on sustainable development,
- faculty exchange schemes to provide an impetus for resource and knowledge-sharing,
- development of common basic SD courses,
- collaboration in developing SD courses in individual member institutions,
- creation of a consortium of business schools to mainstream SD in business and management curricula,
- creation of a facility for joint research activities, and
- the building of alliances with business and industry.

For more information

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RCE Okayama organizes *Kominkan* summit and Lifelong Learning Festival

The Okayama University and Conference of Okayama International NGO Network (COINN), which are the constituent entities of the Okayama ESD Promotion

Commission, held the *Kominkan* Summit in Okayama, in cooperation with UNESCO Bangkok, Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), and the related organizations from October 27 to November 3. The staff from *Kominkans* in Okayama and Community Learning Centres (CLCs) from Asian countries, which are both non-formal education institutions, participated in the meetings to share their experiences of learning activities for building a sustainable society. The Summit adopted the 'Okayama Declaration', which emphasizes the roles of *Kominkans* and CLCs for promoting behavioural change of the local population and for strengthening the network of stakeholders in their community through ESD philosophy. The declaration is available online at the website of the UNESCO Chair at Okayama University

<http://www.civil.okayama-u.ac.jp/~regional/UNESCO/20071027KominkanSummit/Okayama%20Declaration.pdf>

In November, RCE Okayama held the National Lifelong Learning Festival to bring together the various organizations in the area and to make their ESD activities known. About 35 thousand people participated in the event.



54 balloons denoting the volume of CO2 discharged by each person in Japan everyday

For more information

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Southeast Asian RCEs meet at the 11th UNESCO-APEID conference

Several Asian RCEs participated in the 11th UNESCO-APEID Conference on Reinventing Higher Education:

Toward Participatory and Sustainable Development held in Bangkok, Thailand from 12 to 14 December 2007. Three RCEs presented papers reflecting their current activities under the UNU-IAS-organized concurrent session on the Role of Higher Education in Developing Regional Centres of Expertise on ESD. The panel presentations of RCEs Yogyakarta, Penang and Cebu, as well as the poster exhibits of RCE Trang provided prominent displays of some of the valuable contributions of RCEs in the region where they deliver ESD.

During the conference, representatives of these four southeast Asian RCEs met with UNU-IAS representatives to exchange relevant information and share experiences. These RCEs would consider initiating a new thematic RCE network in the area of Participatory and Community Development.

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RCE Saskatchewan awarded CAD 70,300 grant

RCE Saskatchewan was awarded a grant of 70,300 Canadian dollars by the Environment Department of the Government of Saskatchewan, in October 2007. Funding will be used to deliver capacity-building projects identified by RCE Saskatchewan's members. These include student research support for a regional ESD capacity assessment, communications and networking materials, hosting a conference of American RCEs (see event announcements section) in Saskatchewan, and RCE Saskatchewan participation in global RCE meetings.

With the funding, seven post-secondary students will be hired to provide assistance to specific research projects identified by RCE Saskatchewan's six Theme Area Working Groups: Sustainable Infrastructure (including water and energy); Supporting and Bridging Cultures for Sustainable Living and Community Building; Reconnecting to Natural Prairie Ecosystems; Farming and Local Food Production, Consumption and Waste Minimization; Health and healthy lifestyles; and Climate Change. Project deliverables include:

- an initial inventory of SD education activities within the issue area occurring in the region,
- an identification of complimentary SD education activities occurring in other RCEs globally, and
- a review of existing ESD research of regional relevance.

Funding will also be used to raise awareness about ESD work in the region and to build a sense of regional identity.

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Promotion of ESD at formal schools in Japan

In Japan, the Ministry of Environment has strongly supported promotion of ESD as an extension of environmental education, which did not influence implementation of ESD in the formal education system. Now, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) is to put forward new strategies to promote ESD, and to contribute to achieving the goals of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

A two-day symposium on Education for International Understanding was held on the 8th and 9th December at Miyagi University of Education in Sendai, Japan. Speakers from schools, universities, NGOs as well as from MEXT spoke about ESD practice and UNESCO's Associated Schools Project Network (ASPnet) in Japan. As of December 2007, there are 23 ASPnet schools. Isao Kiso, the Secretary-General of Japanese National Commission for UNESCO and the Director-General for International Affairs, MEXT, proposed in his presentation that ASPnet schools should be promoted more widely and function as centres to promote and practice ESD at the school level. It is hoped that the number of ASPnet schools will grow to reach 500 in Japan in the near future.

In addition to the revitalization of ASPnet, reform of the Course of Study currently under consideration at the Central Council for Education will encourage teachers to practice ESD. In Japan, the Course of Study outlines curricula and sets standards for all levels of formal schools. The draft ensures that ESD is integrated in the Course of Study, which will make it easier for teachers to implement ESD related lessons and for schools to secure funds for initiatives related to ESD. The reformed course of study will be officially announced in March 2008.

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RCE Cebu's Project REPORMA

RCE Cebu, in partnership with the Asia-Pacific Forum for Environment and Development (APFEID), initiated its Resource and Poverty Response, Mapping and Management (REPORMA) project last year. The initiative aims at developing ESD knowledge teams and networks within selected communities that are in turn expected to help manage and conserve a 123-hectare forest station. The project expects to educate, train and empower community stakeholders to document and manage their resources and poverty response data that will serve as a framework to implement SD measures.

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Sudbury Children's Water Festival

In its role as the lead organization of RCE Greater Sudbury, the City of Sudbury organized a Children's Water Festival in September last year. Approximately 800 Grade-3 children from Sudbury gathered at the Anderson Farm Museum in Lively to learn about water conservation and how to prevent water pollution through hands-on activities. The festival was a collaborative effort between the Sudbury & District Health Unit, the City of Greater Sudbury, the Anderson Farm Museum and the Nickel District Conservation Authority.



The festival was designed to meet Grade-3 curriculum requirements and to instill strong values in today's youth about water conservation. It brought together educators, water specialists and representatives of industry and government to guide students in their discoveries about the importance of water and the diversity of its uses in historical and modern times. This festival was unique for two reasons: it has been translated and adapted for francophone children, and it introduces the participants to aboriginal culture and beliefs about water.

For more information
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New projects of RCE Sudbury

Four projects have stemmed from recommendations made at the Greater Sudbury RCE launch in 2007.

Active Living/ Healthy Lifestyle Pillar

Lead Agency – Sudbury & District Health Unit
 Project – Integrated trails to improve active transportation linkages and educate the community about the location and benefits of usage across the Greater Sudbury area; promote the ability to access any community by off road neighbourhood connections.

Natural Environment Pillar

Lead Agency - EarthCare
 Project – Food sustainability: Make it easier for the citizens of Greater Sudbury to make sustainable food choices. Rather than purchasing produce from out of the province or country, it would be beneficial to support our local and

provincial suppliers. The goal of the working group is to encourage Sudburians to purchase 5% of their produce grown locally and 20% provincially.

Civic Engagement/Social Capital Pillar

Lead Agency – Social Planning Council
 Project – Develop a greenhouse in association with the Greater Sudbury Farmers Market to facilitate a link between family poverty and assisting marginalized individuals in their growth and skill development.

Economic Growth Pillar

Lead Agency – Greater Sudbury Development Corporation
 Project – establish a partnership with Business Retention and Expansion program to connect community stakeholders on the topics of unemployment, labour force issues as well as out-migration issues.

The Greater Sudbury RCE/Healthy Community Cabinet is currently developing memoranda of understanding as well as terms of reference so that working groups may be formed and are able to move forward with their defined projects in 2008.

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RCE Yogyakarta launched

The launching ceremony of RCE Yogyakarta, Indonesia was held on 17 December 2007 on the occasion of the 58th anniversary celebrations of the Gadjah Mada University. The ceremony was attended by the Minister of National Education of Indonesia, the Rector of the Gadjah Mada University, and other major stakeholders of RCE Yogyakarta. In his message, Yoshihiro Natori from the EfSD Programme of UNU-IAS applauded RCE Yogyakarta for involving university students in community development, particularly on the issue of disaster recovery following the earthquake in the region.

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New member of the EfSD team at UNU-IAS

Miguel Chacon Veliz, a Guatemalan citizen, has recently joined the EfSD team at UNU-IAS as a Post-Doctoral Fellow. Miguel Chacon's study is related to the "System of sustainable development education and research in Central America" that links knowledge production and dissemination process with practices in a network of formal educational institutions, informal educational organizations and public policy making agencies in Central America.

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Call for articles on water education initiatives

The second edition of Education and Sustainability was published by RCE Barcelona in November 2007 with the running theme of Responsible Consumption. The edition included reflections on learning strategies to consume less, the role of consumption in the classroom, public procurement as a pedagogical tool, and the importance of clear, coordinated messages from NGOs, teachers, government and others promoting responsible consumption. The magazine is available in Spanish and Catalan and can be downloaded at www.rce-barcelona.net.

The theme for the Spring 2008 edition is Water, and RCE Barcelona is seeking contributions on innovative water education initiatives from around the world. Please send your ideas to rcebarcelona@gmail.com by February 9, 2008.

Contact : [Heloise Buckland](mailto:Heloise.Buckland@rcebarcelona.net)
www.rce-barcelona.net

Free SD resources online

The Natural Edge Project (TNEP), an independent sustainability think-tank based in Australia has been working with a grant from UNESCO to develop two online courses in sustainable development that are now freely available at <http://www.naturaledgeproject.net/ESSP.aspx>

Call for contributions

CEE (Centre for Environment Education), India, launched the international, peer-reviewed Journal of Education for Sustainable Development (JESD) at the 4th World Environmental Education Congress in Durban, South Africa, in July 2007. JESD encourages you to submit case studies of RCEs to share 'good practices' and 'success stories' of efforts to promote ESD at the local/regional level. The bi-annual journal is published in English.

Contact: jesd@ceeindia.org
www.ceeindia.org/cee/callpaper.html

First domestic RCE Conference in Japan

The First Conference of Japanese RCEs will be held on February 4 in Okayama to share information on the experiences and activities of the six RCEs in Japan. Although Japanese RCEs have met previously at seminars and workshops, this is the first time that a conference will be organized for Japanese RCEs specifically.

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Call for papers

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 24-25 March 2008
Paper submissions are invited for the International Seminar on "Higher Education in the Muslim World: Challenges and Prospects" organized by the International Institute for Muslim Unity, in collaboration with the International Cooperation and Exchange Office of the International Islamic University Malaysia.

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American RCE Conference in Saskatchewan

RCE Saskatchewan will host a conference, tentatively set for May 2008, for American RCEs in Saskatchewan. The conference will allow for regional networking as well as targeted invitations to RCEs in North and South America. The conference will allow RCEs to present ESD research; showcase ESD activities; recognize volunteer contributions; present awards; and provide networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities between organizations engaged in ESD.

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ECO-Iguaçu-2008 Forum

Foz do Iguaçu, Brazil, May 2008
RCE Curitiba-Paraná and the Municipality of Foz do Iguaçu – Paraná State invite RCE representatives to participate in the ECO-Iguaçu-2008 Forum – the First World Forum for Cities Sustainability, and to interact with Ministers and State Secretaries for the Environment from all over the world.

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3rd International RCE conference

Barcelona, Spain, 1-3 July 2008
A survey will be distributed to all RCEs to help define the key objectives, themes and format of the event to ensure it is a useful, inspiring and efficient opportunity for the network.

Conference on Environmental Management for Sustainable Universities (EMSU)

Barcelona, Spain, 15-17 October 2008
EMSU is an international conference series which aims to share sustainability practice in universities. EMSU 2008 is the fifth edition and aims to generate debate on the role of knowledge in five key areas of environmental and social change: Climate change and resource scarcity, Production and consumption patterns, Governance and changing responsibilities, Poverty reduction and equality, Urban systems. The conference will be hosted by the Technical University of Catalonia. RCE Barcelona is seeking RCEs with an interest in Universities and Sustainability to participate in this process.

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