‘Making Right Choices, Becoming A Responsible Consumer’,Towards Sustainable Consumption and Production (SDG 12), an International online via Zoom webinar of the RCEs of Asia-Pacific Region marking celebration of ‘Green Consumer Day’ 2020wasco-hosted by RCE East Kalimantan, RCE East Java (candidate) and RCE Srinagar. Receiving overwhelming response, the webinar was spread over two days Monday-Tuesday, 28 & 29 September 2020. RCEs Kuching and Penang and International Alliance for COVID-19 Community Response (IACCR) supported organizing of this webinar in many ways.

Participation in the webinar on the first day was 355 and 240 on the second day. The participants came from Indonesia, India, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, China, Taiwan, Japan, Bangladesh, South Africa, Kyrgyzstan, the Philippines, Nepal and Pakistan.

RCE community from across Asia-Pacific Region and several non RCE members attended the webinar. The webinar laid emphasis on the participation of the youth and having presentations from them. This webinar discussed the increasing trends of consumerism, threatening sustainability, ways to make the right choices for reducing consumption, reducing footprints, steps to become a responsible consumer, and promoting sustainability.

On the first day, the webinar was opened by the Rector of the University of Jember, Dr. Iwan Taruna. The opening remarks was delivered by Dr. Eun-kyung Park of the Sejahtera Centre and RCE Tongyeong, Republic of Korea.

The first day of the webinar consisted of a panel discussion by experts and practitioners, followed by a Q&A session. The following dignitary speakers addressed the webinar.

1. Her Excellency the Governor of East Java, Mrs. Khofifah Indar Parawansa, who was represented by the Head of Trade and Industry Office of East Java - Dr. Ir. Drajat Irawan
2. Mr. Joni Murtiaji, RCE East Java (Candidate)
3. Ms. Maisara Dandamun Latiph, a Member of Parliament from Bangsamoro, the Philippines
4. Prof. R. Gophichandran of the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC) School of Business, India

Prof. Mario Tabucanon, UNU-IAS gave ‘Concluding Remarks’ on the first day of the webinar.

On the second day, the webinar was opened by the Dean, Faculty of Social and Political Science, University of Jember, Prof. Dr. Hadi Prayitno. The webinar consisted of a panel discussion by experts and practitioners followed by the presentations from RCE youth representatives. This was followed by Q&A session. The dignitary panelists who addressed the webinar were:

1. Mr. Agus Suparmanto - Hon'ble Minister of Trade, Republic of Indonesia
2. Prof. Md Roslan Hashim, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Sustainability and Institutional Development, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang
3. Ms. Josephine Tan, General Manager, Penang Green Council, Representing Office of the Hon'ble Chief Minister, Penang

RCE presentations were made by the following RCEs.

1. RCE Hangzhou presented by Mr. Hao Xin
2. RCE Dobong-gu presented by Dr. Hyun soon Bae joined by Mr. Yang Yoon Sik and Ms. Kim Mi Young
3. RCE Greater Dhaka presented by Md Nazmul Islam
4. RCE Sundarbans presented by Md Shah Paran
5. RCE Srinagar presented by Dr. Abdhesh Kumar Gangwar
6. RCE Jammu presented by Dr. Hari Dutt and Dr. Sheetal Badyal
7. RCE East Java (candidate) presented by Ms. Citra Tunjung Sari Samsudin
8. RCE Penang presented by Prof. Munirah Ghazali and Noorida Aswati Hamzah

Mrs. Agnes Mary Toner of RCE Kuching presented summary of both the days the webinar, given below.

On Monday 28th September 2020, we established the background of where we stand as a planet. It was emphasised that it is crucial that we, the people of earth, need to change before it is too late!

Reaching the goal of sustainable consumption and production is very important, and we should not delay putting what we learn into action.

While looking at consumption and production, we must remember that water is a precious resource on our planet, and it is used in all resource consumption and production. Nature is not simply a resource for our lives; but it is the source of our lives.

It was determined that, even though implementing SDG 12 is complicated, there is a necessity for immediate and effective change. With the earth’s population likely reaching 10 billion by 2050, we will have to produce 50% more food by then if we do not change our consumption and production patterns.

It is also clearly evident that a wholistic and integrated approach must be taken, city by city and nation by nation, in which governments, members of society, non-governmental organisations, and industries all do their part in order to empower everyone to be not only responsible consumers, but also responsible producers because we are all consumers and producers.

On Tuesday, 29th September 2020, we heard about

1. The importance of sustainable management of food waste
2. The digital age and how it impacts consumption and production of electronic goods
3. Green businesses and environment friendly packaging
4. Consumers need to internalise the concept of responsible consumer behaviour until it causes permanent character change.
5. Green Councils (Penang as an example) – implementing creative ways to reduce the carbon footprint of the state.
6. Green buildings, energy efficiency projects and green procurement
7. Sea Circular Project – focus to reduce the adverse impact of plastic pollution on the marine environment

We also focused on individual projects from various RCEs in the Asia-Pacific Region; namely, RCE Hangzhou, RCE Dobong-gu, RCE Greater Dhaka, RCE Sundarbans, RCE Srinagar, RCE Jammu, RCE East Java and RCE Penang.

There was so much to glean from each RCE. But due to time limitations I will only mention some highlights.

Noteworthy trends in the RCE projects and programmes:

1. Collaborating with other RCEs and setting up webinars
2. Involving NGOs, community members and schools in projects and initiatives
3. Involving youth as change agents
4. Involving governments, industries and stakeholders in projects and initiatives
5. Recognising the imperative of reducing our carbon footprint by increasing our handprint – which are our actions towards sustainability
6. Recognising the need to implement and adopt a wholistic and integrated approach
7. Recognising the need to infuse SDGs into the local school curricula

Before I finish, I would like to emphasise:

1. The importance of a wholistic and integrated approach in our RCEs - involving government, schools, stakeholders, and industries
2. Education must be the driving force through which all members of society, government and industry (don’t forget industries) can learn how to change their consumer attitudes and behaviours.
3. Infusing SDGs in school curricula is of paramount importance
4. Give millennials leadership roles because they are the ones in our societies who are passionate about green initiatives

It takes generations to learn a new culture. And this is exactly what we are doing when we try to convince society to embrace the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We are initiating a new eco-friendly world culture. It will take both time and influence to bring the lasting change that we seek. And the best avenue for that is education.

Thank you again for inviting me to share my thoughts. Great job, University of Jember, RCE East Java (candidate) and RCE Srinagar on organising and running this international webinar! Congratulations also to all the RCEs who presented! You did a wonderful job. Keep up the great work and don’t give up! Step by step we will reach our goal!

“Inspiration with perspiration produces realisation”.

Thank you. - Agnes Mary Toner