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Ministry of the Environment

Report

13th Asia-Pacific RCE Regional Meeting

Part 2: SDGs and ESD for 2030 Framework: Local actions during COVID-19 Pandemic

Online Meeting 5th October 2021

The 13th Asia-Pacific RCE Regional Meeting – Part 2 successfully conducted by RCE Kyrgyzstan/Arabaev Kyrgyz State University, Faculty of Geography, and Tourism with the valuable support of the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability in Japan (UNU-IAS). The Webinar was held at the Faculty of Geography, Ecology and Tourism at the CACTLE Center. In total, around 65 people participated in the webinar, where 45 people from Asia Pacific RCEs, stakeholders and 20 AKSU teachers and students attended.

13th Asia-Pacific RCE Regional Meeting Objectives:

- Deepen understanding of the ESD for 2030 framework and its linkage with local actions and learn about the trend of the RCEs' response to COVID-19 pandemic.
- Share and learn from cases conducted by RCEs in the AP region on real transformation of education from pre and post COVID-19.
- Discuss and clarify next steps to move forward for further implementation of ESD and SDGs.

Opening session

RCE Kyrgyzstan opened the meeting with “A brief report on the 13th AP Regional Meeting – Part 1” by Dr. Chinara Sadykova (RCE Kyrgyzstan), followed by the following remarks:

- Opening Remarks by Prof. Abdrakhmanov Tolobek (AKSU Rector) (A video message)
- Remarks by Dr. Jonghwi Park (Programme Head, Innovation and Education Programme, UNU-IAS)
- Congratulatory Remarks Mr. Takeo Sugii (Director, Office of Environmental Education, General Policy Division, Ministry's Secretariat, Ministry of the Environment, Japan) (A video message)

Session #1: RCE updates from Global RCE Service Centre

ESD for 2030: Roadmap and Examples in Asia and the Pacific

Dr Faryal Khan, Education Programme Specialist, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, presented the roadmap of the ESD for 2030 and some examples implementing

the framework at the national level in the Asia and Pacific region. The key points of her presentation can be summarised as follows:

- SDG 4.7 states that all learners acquire the skills to promote sustainable development, and human rights should be promoted as a key to global citizenship.
- ESD for 2030 aims to build a more just and sustainable world by strengthening education for sustainable development. Its objective is the full integration of ESD and the 17 SDGs into the learning environments. By 2030, governments, citizens, youth, learners and educators should make efforts to mainstream ESD into all education frameworks and policies, harness ESD to reimagine the future of our societies and enhance resilience to future global crises.
- ESD raises awareness of the 17 SDGs in education settings and equips learners with the critical emotional and cognitive skills to apply the SDGs in local settings. Key skills are courage, persistence and determination, as well as action competencies.
- Environmental and climate education should be integrated into a core curriculum component at every level, and the inclusion of marginalised communities, including refugees, disabled, those affected by conflict, should be prioritised.
- UNESCO's role is to support countries to mobilise resources to support ESD integration.
- Country example: In Indonesia, where ESD has been embedded in the curriculum since 2013, sustainable lifestyles have been mainstreamed as a school culture (Green Schools), ESD has been included in professional development for educators and students also at the tertiary level. Furthermore, youth is mobilised in the Boy Scouts programme.

Integrating SDGs and ESD for 2030 Framework into National Planning Process to Accelerate Local Level Actions

Prof Rashed al Mahmud Titumir presented how to integrate SDGs and ESD for the 2030 framework into the national planning process to accelerate actions at the local level. Key points can be summarised as follows:

- K shaped recovery curve can lead to two paths: 1) Stimulus packages for big businesses, benefits for government employees, leading to security for those in the formal sector; 2) Income erasure for those in small businesses, agriculture, informal businesses, further disempowerment of women and other vulnerable groups – leading to worsening the situation of the already poor and widening of existing inequalities, the rise of polarization.
- In some Asia-Pacific countries, progress towards SDGs is stagnating or declining, but there is still progress in some areas of SDGs, notably climate change. Overall, the SDGs course has been derailed. Measured by complete or partial school closures, the pandemic has greatly worsened the learning crisis.
- The pandemic has left more children out of school, increased learning inequality, disrupted teacher training, and increased psychosocial trauma.
- A concerted approach for 2030 will mean: Response (more children included in online learning), systems recovery (all children previously enrolled immediately return when schools reopen) and increasing resilience (remote learning integrated into basic education system).
- Sustainability requires ownership and commitment, institutional capacity, financial sustainability, engagement of key rightsholders.

Updates from the Global RCE Service Centre 2020-2021

Dr. Fumiko Noguchi (UNU-IAS, Research Fellow) presented overall updates from the Global Network of RCEs and key findings of the research on Asia Pacific RCEs during the pandemic.

The first part can be summarised as follows:

1. Seven (7) new RCEs were acknowledged in 2020, including four from Asia-Pacific region, making the total number of RCEs to 181 globally.
2. RCE Awards 2020 - 33 recipients were awarded across three categories namely Outstanding Flagship, Acknowledged Flagship, and Honourable Mentioned projects.
3. Two Global RCE pre-conference webinars were organised in February and June 2021 prior to the 12th RCEs Global Conference to be hosted by RCE Scotland from 16-18 Nov 2021.
4. RCE regional meetings were organised online in four continents participated by 735 RCE members and non-members.
5. The efforts and activities addressing climate change made by RCEs were also crystallised into the publication entitled 'Tackling Climate Action at the Local Level: Education for Sustainable Development Projects from the Global RCE Network' and a video 'RCE Climate Projects During the Global Action Programme on ESD.
6. As a guide for the RCE community's collective actions towards the SDGs and the ESD for 2030 framework, the Roadmap for the RCE Community 2021- 2030 was developed presenting the long-term vision and mission of the RCE community.

Key findings of the AP RCEs research on Rethinking community based ESD during the COVID 19 pandemic were presented. Situational analysis was made based on the data collected through participant observation at three webinar series (18 May, 9 June and 11 June), questionnaire distributed to RCEs, participant observation at AP RCE Regional Webinar Series and focus group with 8 RCEs in Japan.

Three webinars informed that 26 RCEs continued, modified or newly launched their community projects. 14 RCEs conducted their existing/ new projects through digitalisation. 13 RCEs launched new projects (based on need analysis). In some RCEs, the youth actively participated in the local community by using IT skills.

Questionnaire responses revealed two important elements: socio-economic impact by the Covid-19 and digitalisation. While 15 RCEs chose digitalisation as the main tool to continue their RCE activities, two main challenges that arose through digitalisation were observed:

- Lack of ICT devices and infrastructure to support digitalised learnings.
- There are areas of activities which cannot be addressed or responded to through digitalisations.

On the other hand, opportunities for networking and more learning (workshop, seminar, training, e-learning module development) is increased through digitalisation.

Finally, focus group with RCEs in Japan on the theme of digitalisation indicated four (4) types of digital divide which are related to physical (lack of infrastructure, device and space), emotional (loneliness of digital generation), nature/ types of activities and knowledge (care and support works, outdoor/experiential learnings) and capacity (lack of IT literacy of learners and lack of skills and knowledge of practitioners for digitalising activities).

Moving forward, four policy recommendations are proposed:

1. Provide clear priority and guideline for the local ESD activities during the pandemic.
2. Provide financial resources for the local ESD activities during the pandemic.
3. Provide capacity building opportunities and emotional support for the local actors and practitioners.

4. Provide networking opportunities for the local actors to share the information and practices and advocacies.

Session 2: Share good ESD practices, successful activities, teaching methods/methodologies in times of COVID-19

Moderated by Prof. Mario Tabucanon (UNU-IAS, Adjunct Professor), six RCEs (RCE Srinagar, RCE Greater Dhaka, RCE Dobongu-gu, RCE Kuching, RCE Greater Phnom Penh & RCE Hangzhou) presented across the following ESD for 2030 priority areas:

- #1 Local actions on advancing policy.
- #2 Local actions on transforming learning environments.
- #3 Local actions on building capacities of educators.
- #4 Local actions on empowering and mobilizing youth.

During the panel discussion, discussant, Dr. Faryal Khan (Programme Specialist for Education, UNESCO Bangkok) congratulated the presenters for the excellent work being done in the field despite all the constraints in the midst of covid-19 programme. The initiatives presented are truly commendable and a clear indication of the effectiveness of the RCE networks to enable teachers, students, communities and local governments to continue playing the key role in enabling ESD. There were also excellent examples of how ESD is integrated as part of national strategy, local government strategy and the modalities of implementation. And this has been a spear of innovation and creativity. She also recognised the knowledge and practices that have been carried out by the RCEs in relation to ESD and how the resources were used effectively.

Dr. Faryal also acknowledged the tremendous effort on how teaching and learning (T&L) is being strengthened through various efforts. The presentations demonstrate how teachers and educators are being provided the support they need in the midst of covid-19 pandemic to have innovative T&L approaches, bringing in new activities to enrich the work for the learners. Another key element that caught her attention was the participatory approach and the engagement of the multiple stakeholders in each initiative. This is the strength of RCEs and key points for sustainability of these initiatives.

Takeaways from the individual 6 presentations were indeed impressively summarised by Dr. Faryal which goes, as summarised below:

ESD Priority Area 1: Local actions on advancing policy.

Presented by Dr. Abdhesh Kumar Gangwar RCE Srinagar's initiative at the village level of Panchayat in Uttar Pradesh, integrating principles of ESDs into local governance is an excellent example and tremendous effort to build capacity at local levels. By orienting the Panchayat members to manage their "panchayats" smartly and integrating ESD as part of development plans, it provides a great opportunity to mobilise resources, align the efforts at the local level and engage partners to converge and harmonise efforts.

ESD Priority Area 2: Local actions on transforming learning environments

RCE Kuching's responsible tourism initiative was an essential example of how the enhancement of local actions has been carried out through multi-sectoral and multi-disciplinary collaboration on ESD at local levels. The whole initiative of responsible tourism is multi-sectoral, it engaged local community members and it gave them an opportunity to align their efforts at local levels. Therefore, it goes beyond education and includes environment, climate,

culture and sustainable economy and other relevant developments that were able to come together.

Likewise, the programme by RCE Dhaka where the students work on water conversion, waste management, replanting as well as the introduction of ESD into the curriculum has provided a great opportunity to create a transformation of an education and learning environment.

RCE Dubong-Gu's Experimental Challenges initiatives such as Project Neuru gives us a great opportunity to learn important lessons in the midst of covid-19 where the opportunity is used to address the covid-19 challenges. In short, lessons learned from the experience of Project Neuru, RCE Dhaka and the Pandei Tourism programme of RCE Kuching indicate how efforts to transform the learning environment are taking place.

ESD Priority Area 3: Local actions on building capacities of educators

Presented by Dr. Jeeranuch Sakkhamduang RCE Greater Phnom Penh Programme highlights the crucial role not just of teachers but also officers and farmers to promote ESD and invest in capacity development at all levels. This ensures the multi-sectoral approach to address environmental issues such as pest management, use of chemicals and demands participation and the engagement of young farmers raises awareness on sustainable and responsible consumption and production. Hence, by connecting farmers and education institutions the farms become learning spaces for learners and youth and this is highly essential in working across sectors and strengthening capacity not just of education officials but also across the board.

ESD Priority Area 4: Local actions on empowering and mobilizing youth

Earth Successor Project by Mr. Hao Xin RCE Hangzhou really empowered people as change agents by creating opportunities for learning and civic participation by providing them with the competencies and the tools they need in participating in ESD to enable societal transformation. The work that the kids and learners were doing in Hangzhou was indeed inspiring. Social resources were optimised by including the young learners and youth, with the leaders cultivating them to become future leaders of tomorrow. Hence, the work that has been done to motivate young learners to optimise their full potential (through curriculum), to engage multiple stakeholders and strengthen the training capacity of teachers, really empowered teachers to empower learners.

Towards the end, Prof. Mario Tabucanon concluded Session 2 with the following general takeaways:

1. Despite the pandemic, RCEs continue to function and deliver and there is no doubt that RCE practices contribute to ESD for 2030.
2. All the presentations demonstrated RCEs' roles as local and regional hubs for the ESD. Those are all very effective ways, effective projects and practices delivered to the community. It serves as the source of knowledge for innovation and leading by examples.
3. The RCEs are equipped with the capacity to provide learning platforms facilitated and promoted whether it is direct in person community engagement, virtual webinars, developing learning modules, etc. The platforms are there in various ways and channels.
4. The pandemic also has shown that hybrid approach to education is emerging. Virtual learning with the appropriate mix of virtual and in person modality appears to be a workable approach.

In the era of technology enabled transformation (as highlighted in ESD for 2030 framework), the pandemic has created the demand of having high speed internet infrastructure.

Lastly, Prof Mario reminded RCE members on the core elements of RCE which includes wide collaborations and networking, participative governance, research & development and transformative education.

Session 3: Presentations on RCE joint projects

The three presentations on RCE joint projects were dynamic exemplars of how RCEs across Asia-Pacific are connecting with each other (and with wider global networks) through agile and virtual technologies. Despite the challenges and ravages of COVID-19, RCEs again have demonstrated their flexibility and willingness to connect with and learn from each other and to build capacity for ESD across the region. Each of the very different initiatives had a strong focus on place based local initiatives linked to global concerns and challenges. The RCE SDG Youth Challenge focuses on empowering youth leaders to make local change and connects these leaders to each other through peer-to-peer mentoring and support. Project Neuru features strong pedagogical and research design in developing junior and senior high school and college students as participant researchers to share their diverse experiences of hamburgers through photovoice. The Rivers, Water and Livelihood initiative by RCE Kuching brings together those RCEs across Asia Pacific with a focus on rivers and water health and provides a valuable platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration. All three joint projects were highly engaging and successful.

‘RCE SDG Youth Challenge: Youth for the Goals’

Ms. Brittany Hardiman (RCE Greater Western Sydney, Australia)

The RCE SDG Youth Challenge “Youth for the Goals” is an international youth-led project-based initiative run annually that connects youth leaders working in their own communities to a larger global platform that includes mentoring support and peer validation. The challenge has been running for 4 years and supported Youth Leaders from 24 RCEs engaged with 56 initiatives across 12 countries with 6 external organisations. The 2021 RCE Youth SDG Challenge focuses on SDG 11: Sustainable Cities, SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production and SDG 15: Life on Land. The repeat is due to the impacts on COVID-19 seen in the previous challenge. RCE Greater Western Sydney is seeking another RCE to take over the next phase of the Asia Pacific SDG youth challenge and will support this transition and handover with mentoring and advice.

‘Project Neuru’

Dr. Bae Hyunsoon (RCE Dobong-gu, South Korea)

The aim of Project Neuru was to cultivate ecological leadership and glocal leadership. The initiative was developed in response to low ESD perception, no experience in overseas activities and to support the first year of ecological education transformation in Seoul education policy. The mission was to ask participants to self-reflect on hamburger consumption within the global food network. Using photovoice as a research method 4 RCEs and 1 organisation participated in the initiative. Project Neuru provided the participating junior and senior high school students as well as college students with the opportunity to become participant researchers and to discuss in small groups across countries the diversity of food systems. RCE Dobong-gu is a local government centred RCE and secured the budget for this initiative.

‘Rivers, Water and Livelihood’

Prof. Dr Yeong Siew Wei (RCE Kuching, Malaysia)

The objective of this initiative is to bring together and form a collegial partnership for the RCEs of Asia Pacific for rivers and water ecosystem health with a focus on SDG6 Clean water and sanitation, SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities, SDG 14 Life Below Land, SDG 15 Life on Land and SDG 17 Partnerships for the Goals. RCE Kuching has delivered a vital platform for raising awareness, advancing knowledge, experience sharing and encouraging joint activities for rivers, water and livelihoods. Between November 2020 and October 2021, 16 RCEs from 17 Countries with 417 participants collaborated on this initiative. The initiative includes a World Water Day Valuing Water forum in March and culminated in World Rivers Day RCE Asia Pacific Forum in September. The work is a valuable cross-national collaborative in water knowledges and practices.

Closing Session

The representative from RCE Kyrgyzstan and the Head of International Department, Kyrgyzstan State University, thanked all participants for their active engagement, the organising committee members, the Global RCE Service Centre and Dr Chinara for all their work.

Furthermore, Dr Chinara from RCE Kyrgyzstan expressed her gratitude to the AP RCE Coordinating Committee and all participants for a productive session where we learnt from UNESCO and each other on the roadmap for ESD. She also acknowledged the support and tremendous contributions made by the following institutes as well as people:

- Ministry of Environment of Japan
- Dr Kahn, Dr Rashid, Dr Noguchi
- Prof. Tabucanon and Dr Chokkar
- Ms Konishi
- All presenters, note-takers and participants
- Asia Pacific RCE members
- Kyrgyzstan State University

The 13th Asia-Pacific RCE Regional Meeting was closed by wishing health, success and all the best.

Participants were invited to join an informal, free discussion on ongoing and potential future joint projects immediately following the meeting.