Advancing ESD Beyond 2014: Strategy for Asia-Pacific RCEs

The UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) ends in 2014 but its vision to create a world where everyone has the opportunity to benefit from education and learning to bring about a transformation in society towards sustainability lives on. UNESCO spearheads the launch of the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD post-2014 and has extended invitations to organizations and networks, including the RCE community, to make official commitments. The GAP identifies five priority areas - policy support, whole-institution approaches, educators, youth and local communities - as key leverage points to advance ESD agenda beyond 2014.

The Asia-Pacific RCEs are committed to continue to make contributions and upscale efforts to advance the ESD vision beyond 2014. This document[1] encapsulates the aspirations of the Asia-Pacific RCE community beyond 2014, and serves as inputs to discussions at the 9th Global RCE Conference in Okayama, Japan. The category of issues covered are aligned with, but not necessarily limited to, the priority actions areas of the GAP; and any specific RCE action can be exemplified in relation to the general actions, across priority areas, highlighted in this strategy document.

1. Policy Support

The strategy for advancing policy is through engaging in policy making processes, from setting policy agenda, policy formulation, policy implementation, to policy monitoring and evaluation. Policy cycle interventions and support by RCEs could entail the following actions:

1.1 Establishing enabling mechanisms to assist RCE stakeholders participate in sustainable development (SD) policy making in line with their individual mandated

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[1] This document was first developed based on responses to a survey conducted by the Global RCE Service Centre, and evolving through discussions at the 7th Asia-Pacific RCEs Meeting in Penang, Malaysia, and subsequently opened to deliberation by the Asia-Pacific RCE community at large.

areas of concern. Diversity of the RCE membership, and having close linkages with education organizations, broaden the scope to which SD could be disseminated and implemented.

1.2 Networking and building linkages with stakeholders - governmental and non-governmental – to provide value added role in advancing ESD. Networking include across RCEs in Asia-Pacific, sharing experiences on policy influence.

1.3 Promoting ESD as national programmes, through, for example, the Ministry of Education or Ministry of the Environment, or at best, coordination between these ministries, with support from other related ministries; promoting ESD actions at the ministry level would possibly sustain ESD-based existing programmes. Regionally-based RCEs could coordinate actions to engage policymakers to put these programmes into practice.

1.4 Assisting in strategic and action planning workshops for policymaking, and institutionalizing implementation of ESD in member organizations.

1.5 Engaging in policy advocacy to infuse the ESD concept into mainstreaming school curricula through the government.

1.6 Developing policy through locally-based collaboration and community engagement principle of the RCE model, with a process for working together, keeping the activities responsive and accountable to the contributing communities. A framework that ensures that local/regional initiatives are in dynamic engagement with national policies will bring vitality and responsiveness to the policy process. A system of national policy accountability to communities implementing such education and learning programmes will be a great catalyst for bringing ESD into national education policy.

1.7 Creating education initiatives for sustainability in education policy environment. There may be provision for education for sustainability but there is poor level of teacher education engagement in mainstream education.

1.8 Contributing to policy research, including review and analysis of issues. Being a diverse multi-stakeholder network, the incorporation of various stakeholders' concerns and on-ground reality can help push, shape and guide policy

formulation/revision, if and where necessary. This will ensure that public policy is inclusive and is in sync with the current situation.

1.9 Creating tangible benchmarks on local and global concerns, identifying important indicators, and also serving as a monitoring and evaluation body to check implementation progress and impact.

2. Whole-Institution Approaches

The strategy for transforming learning and training environments is through engaging the whole institution, from central to distributed leadership to education actors at all levels, in developing a vision and plan for reorientation of the institution. This requires actions that include the following:

2.1 Sponsoring seminars and training programmes for the integration of SD in the curriculum, both in basic and tertiary education levels. This increases the capacity of educators and trainers who are instrumental for the continued and sustained implementation of SD. Moreover, it could also mobilize its non-learning institution members to integrate SD in their information drive as part of their mandated function.

2.2 Engaging in works/projects documenting and showcasing experiences so that a rich database can be assimilated sensitive to context and locally-specific challenges in order to contribute to cross-learning and knowledge sharing.

2.3 Engaging in demonstrating models for whole-institution approaches through various programmes, and changing mindsets of administrators and educators. A three-tier action plan would help: policy intervention at the curricular level; sensitization of administrators and training and capacity building of teachers; and demonstration through handholding at the ground level through piloting.

3. Educators

The strategy for building capacities of educators and trainers is through engaging in conducting courses and training programmes, both formal and informal, and in

developing ESD learning materials, and to ensure that educators are open to different epistemologies. This requires actions that include the following:

3.1 Building capacity and training educators at various levels and forms. Due to the presence of formal, non-formal and informal education actors in the network, including those from the private sector, the ability to engage with educators should be possible and more importantly, impactful. Successful methods and modules could be documented to enable knowledge sharing and learning.

3.2 Working closely with educators in addressing the needs of the students, providing innovative solutions for schools; and engaging in building capacity of students and teachers by various modes and medium on ESD.

3.3 Developing training modules for educators on SD and ESD competencies, including how to integrate SD issues into courses. The pre-service and in-service trainings received by the teachers so far may have been for one discipline. ESD is essentially a multi-disciplinary approach, which may be new to the teachers who may have been trained on conventional approaches.

4. Youth

The strategy for empowering and mobilizing youth is through giving opportunities for youth leadership, to become change agents in societal transformation through various youth activities and innovative approaches, and to create an environment whereby youth come to RCEs to participate in ESD actions. This requires actions that include the following:

4.1 Guiding and facilitating the formation of youth networks in collaboration with schools and universities under the identified RCE domains of work.

4.2 Providing a platform for youth to interact, exchange and also collaborate on projects of mutual interests; and playing a key role in bringing together a network of youth.

4.3 Developing leadership programmes for youth in areas of sustainability and entrepreneurship, as well as in intergenerational learning processes and issues in sustainable development.

4.4 Hosting of youth interns and volunteers to engage in ESD activities. Constituent educational institutions source interns/volunteers to the RCE secretariat, and based on the need, the secretariat can engage them in various programmes in partnership with other member organizations.

5. Local Communities

The strategy for accelerating sustainable solutions at the local level is through widening the diversity of stakeholders, inclusive participation, assisting the socially vulnerable and marginalized groups in society, promoting mutual learning, and working with other like-minded networks. This requires actions that include the following:

5.1 Adopting local communities, building synergies in their areas of operation, and driving work around their thrust areas so as to generate and scale-up actions, especially in enhancing the weaker sections of communities.

5.2 Engaging the local communities. RCE partners are bringing in expertise of handling different stakeholder groups. The competencies needed to handle livelihood focused programmes or school focused programmes may be different.

5.3 Linking communities to each school/ educational institution for sustainability of the institution; for this essentially the government has to take the lead; and directly reaching out to communities for sustainability issues of the community.

5.4 Working with local communities, in partnership with colleges or higher education institutions. The faculty and students benefit from the opportunities of learning through real-life projects and interactions. Communities benefit from the structured and professional approach to specific projects that university or college faculty and students provide.

5.5 Supporting the participatory ESD process in the local government, by helping develop systems at the municipal authority, enhancing community participation in the process by outreach work, as well as documentation of and research about different elements of the ESD process. The experiences of facilitating the partnership between educators, youth, the local authorities, and communities in projects can give valuable insights into multi-stakeholder action learning.

5.6 Deepening its engagement in participatory governance through a combination of two approaches. The first is structured collaborative action learning with a group of community facilitators and the network of RCE members or associates. The second is to attempt to introduce a public deliberation element into the participatory ESD process of the municipality.

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