11th Global RCE Conference (Cebu) Report

The 11th Global RCE Conference was hosted by RCE Cebu from 7-9 December, 2018 in Cebu, Philippines. Nicole Kennard and Brittany Foutz were sponsored by RCE Atlanta to attend the Conference. The conference focused on all United Nations sustainable development goals and RCE projects from all over the world. From the conference, participants were able to connect with other RCE locations to work together to develop solutions to each locations' main initiatives and develop lasting connections in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The conference was extremely insightful in learning challenges that RCE centers worldwide face in working with the UN's SDGs.

Conference Overview

Countries from all over the world gave updates on sustainable education projects being undertaken by their RCEs. In Cebu, the city and region hosting the conference, the Mayor's Office is working with the RCE on various projects to increase economic development, educational access, and safety of the city, including: the longlife program, where diabetes and hypertension medicines are delivered to homes of people everyday for free; a new light rail to decrease commute times; payments made to students to incentivize completion of high school; payments made to senior citizens; integration of climate change education to public schools; creation of a sustainable development scorecard in collaboration with the UK and UN; helping illegal street vendors gain security and tenure for land.

UNESCO also presented about their commitment as leaders of the global ESD agenda, through implementation of the Global Action Programme, which has five priorities: advancing policy, transforming learning environments, building teachers' capacity, empowering and mobilising youth, and accelerating sustainable solutions at a local level. UNESCO works on collaborative projects with RCEs, which they have funding for, and ask that RCEs contact them with project ideas 1-2 years in advance of the project start date to obtain assistance and funding.

Different ways to increase and integrate ESD curriculum in schools was a major discussion point. RCE Greater Nairobi suggested having RCEs 'adopt-a-school' as a focused way to increase visibility of the RCE, make K-12 partners, and work ESD curriculum into one place first (in a pilot approach) and then expand from there. RCE Cebu is working on integrating 'green job' professional courses into high schools, that give students practical skills that can be used for sustainable development, such as learning how to install solar panels. RCE Nizhny Novgorod (Russia) is developing a sustainable entrepreneurship program for university students, which provides them with access to investors and regional incubators. RCE Tongyeong in South Korea has created an ESD facility in a forest conservation area (Sejahtera Forest), which they call a center for edu-tourism. Summer camps, field trips, and retreats take place in this facility to connect with nature and increase ESD. RCE Tongyeong has also begun integrating ESD into public schools by finding 1-2 ESD leads at each school in the region to spearhead ESD curriculum; they now have 58 committed ESD teachers.

Issues of RCE engagement were also discussed by panels and representatives from all countries. It was emphasized that RCEs need to engage more with community groups in a bottom-up, co-creative approach to create new projects based on the community's needs. An example is the mobile living labs that have been set up by RCE Borderlands U.S.-Mexico, where RCE officials go into a community, listen to their challenges relating to sustainable development, and then create projects to tackle these challenges on the ground with community leaders. RCE Greater Nairobi also called for increased accountability for RCEs, and the need to create an SDG reporting system as an accountability mechanism to citizens rather than the UN.

Presentations from RCE Greater Atlanta

On Friday, 7 December 2018, from 16:45-17:00, Nicole Kennard from RCE Atlanta gave a presentation on a new sustainable development project she is leading in Atlanta, called "Code Green." Nicole Kennard first became involved in RCE Greater Atlanta as an engineering undergraduate student at Georgia Tech. Nicole was part of many

sustainability clubs and projects on campus, and worked for GT's Center for Serve-Learn-Sustain her senior year (2016-2017), helping with the RCE application process. Now, Nicole has just begun a PhD focused on urban agriculture at the University of Sheffield, in the UK. Much of her research during her PhD will still be focused in Atlanta, and she still remains involved in RCE Atlanta.

Code Green is an educational program being developed by volunteers for a nonprofit called the Bija Foundation, which is focused on capacity building for small-scale sustainability projects. The Code Green program teaches computer science to students by having them write code for sensors to automate hydroponic (soilless growing) systems. In this way, students are able to learn computer science in a hands-on way by using code to grow food. This also helps address both issues of education access and food access in Atlanta. Code Green is still in its development stages, with curriculum being written by Georgia Tech graduates and industry partners at Epic and Google. The program specifically hopes to address the inequities in access to advanced educational opportunities for high school students in south Atlanta. The program begins with introductory lessons to coding in Python and hands-on lessons about building and maintaining hydroponic systems and growing food. In the final project, students will work together to install sensors that will take measurements on temperature, water level, and nutrient level in the hydroponic reservoir. They will also write code to process the data from the sensors and create a response in the system, such as adding water or nutrients to the reservoir automatically. The first pilot class began last year at Benjamin Mays High School with an AP Environmental Science class that already had an outdoor greenhouse with a hydroponic system they used in class. Volunteers from Bija taught introductory coding lessons to the high school teacher first, and then attended the classroom twice a week to teach these lessons to the students alongside the teacher. Feedback from this class was used to develop the curriculum further to better suit students who had never been exposed to computer science education before. In the long term, the program will be shared with other high schools in south Atlanta, as well as with nontraditional educational platforms, such as summer camps at urban farms. The final product will be an open-source curriculum and hydroponic system kit / building manual that teachers can download and use to increase computer science education in their classrooms. The hope is that this will increase access to computer science education for students who do not have these classes offered at their high schools, and therefore increase opportunities for these students to obtain high-paying jobs in computer science.

On Saturday, 8 December 2018 from 14:00-15:30, Brittany Foutz, from RCE Atlanta, presented a community education workshop entitled "Human Trafficking in One of the Biggest Hubs". Brittany Foutz is a Ph.D. Candidate at Kennesaw State University, Kennesaw, Georgia USA and presented her research on human trafficking in the Atlanta metro area. The strategic prioritization of the SDGs have a direct bearing on the lives of vulnerable and marginalized groups worldwide and can have great influence on combating human trafficking. Human trafficking, especially, relates to the United Nations sustainable development goals #3, 4, and 16. However, there is great applicability to all of the sustainable development goals. This workshop involved delegates from the 11th Global RCE Conference of different backgrounds, cultures, and countries to work together to brainstorm solutions to human trafficking. The purpose of this research is to improve the well-being of victims through the United Nations sustainable development goals, and so that structures and their stakeholders can assess the progress made in terms of the effectiveness and quality of their work regarding human trafficking and transitional justice mechanisms. In conclusion, participants noted a possible struggle when trying to reach some of the sustainable development goals and their targets, but notice at some of the other sustainable development goal that address the roots causes of the problem can better assist with the issue.

RCE Americas Breakout Session Summary

Date: December 8th, 2018
Name of Facilitator: Dr. Kimberley Smith (RCE Portland)
Name of Rapporteur: Ms. Nicole Kennard (RCE Greater Atlanta)
Attendees: RCE Atlanta (Ms. Nicole Kennard, Ms. Brittany Foutz), RCE Portland (Dr. Kimberley Smith, Ms.

Serena Dressel, Mr. Joseph Culhane), RCE Borderlands Mexico-United States (Prof. Carolina López), Dr. Charles Hopkins (RCE Americas Advisor)

Main Discussion Points:
1) Community engagement / participation / communication barriers ; need for community inclusivity and making the RCE available as a resource to all community groups
2) Affordability and capacity ; need to find ways to address issues of basic needs first in some communities before other projects; need to build capacity of RCEs and find additional sources of funding
3) Ownership of Americas Youth Network and barriers to Youth Network engagement (language differences / distance / availability of computers and internet connection / funding)

Main Action Items:
1) Find ways to increase community engagement in RCE – surveys / studies to identify community needs, hosting events and community celebrations
2) Focus more on grant writing to increase funding for RCE, with RCEs in the Americas working together to apply for grants collaboratively
3) Appoint two leaders of the RCE Americas Youth Network (one from North America and one from Central / South America, preferably both bilingual) ; create a phone-based communication platform for the Youth Network (i.e., WhatsApp group) and decide what to share on which social media platforms

Detailed Summary

For 1.5 hours, each RCE region convened in a separate breakout session to talk about projects, challenges, and potential areas for collaboration within their RCE region. Throughout the discussion for the Americas, we continued talking about some of the topics mentioned in the last RCE Americas regional meeting in Posadas, Argentina (7th RCE Meeting of the Americas, 25-27 October 2018), specifically concerning community engagement and inclusivity and about starting a regional RCE Youth Network.

In speaking about community inclusivity we discussed how RCEs need to engage with communities to understand the main sustainability issues that are being faced and how RCEs can be used as a resource for communities. We understand that RCEs should be utilised for bottom-up, co-creative projects between higher education and other community groups, rather than the more traditional knowledge transfer or top-down engagement approaches common in academic settings. We also discussed the need to bring more voices, especially from different backgrounds and different sectors, to the table. In terms of finding ways to increase community engagement and inclusivity, one idea that came to light was having RCEs help specific communities or neighbourhoods fund, plan, and hold celebratory events that would share their culture and experiences with other groups throughout the city and surrounding areas. These events could also be used to bring in industry partners and potential funders and to help promote local goods and cottage industries in these communities. In addition, RCE Borderlands Mexico-United States presented an interesting model they are using to connect with different communities in their region, by setting up mobile living labs to interact with the community. These mobile living labs work with the community to identify challenges toward sustainable development and work together to develop solutions to these issues on the ground.

In discussing the need for increased community inclusivity in the RCEs, the issue of affordability arose. We saw a need for RCEs to help in tackling social issues, especially by helping those living in underserved communities meet basic living needs. This issue is particularly emphasized in RCE Borderlands, where many sustainable development

projects are focused on building local economies and helping grow cottage industries. We saw a need for other RCEs in the Americas, particularly those with more funding and in more affluent regions, to support other RCEs struggling to help their communities meet basic living needs. RCEs can support each other through collaborative research, collaborative grant writing, and perhaps even having RCEs with more available funding sponsor youth or representatives from other RCEs to attend conferences and share their experiences.

We also discussed how we could increase communication between the different RCEs in the Americas, especially between those in North and Central / South America, as this becomes more difficult with the language barrier. This discussion specifically focused on increasing communication via the creation of a regional RCE Youth Network, which has already been done in other regions (such as for RCEs in Africa). Specifically, we made an action item to have 2-3 point people (preferably bilingual) from North, Central, and South America to run the regional Youth Network and connect the RCEs. We also discussed connecting the youth network through an annual virtual conference (which RCE Grand Rapids is planning this year), but we learned that in some areas (i.e., RCE Borderlands) it may be difficult for some students to attend due to poor internet connection and lack of computer access. Therefore, we discussed alternative platforms for communication, and decided that creating a communication platform that can be used on mobile phones would be the most accessible for youth in all RCEs. Therefore, we have another action point to create a mobile phone based communication platform (such as a WhatsApp group) for the regional RCE Youth Network. We also believe face-to-face communication of youth in the RCEs is vital for the development of future sustainable development projects, and discussed ways that this could be achieved. One idea was to develop a regional "alternative spring break" program, where youth from different RCEs would travel together to perform a service project in one location over their spring break periods. We will continue looking for ways to increase communication and engagement between RCEs within the Americas region.