

The 14th Global RCE Conference

Rethinking Learning for a Sustainable Future:

20 Years of RCE Action and Innovation

Okayama City, Japan

21–23 October 2025

Conference Report



UNU
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50TH ANNIVERSARY
UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY
2025



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Ministry of the Environment

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Executive Summary

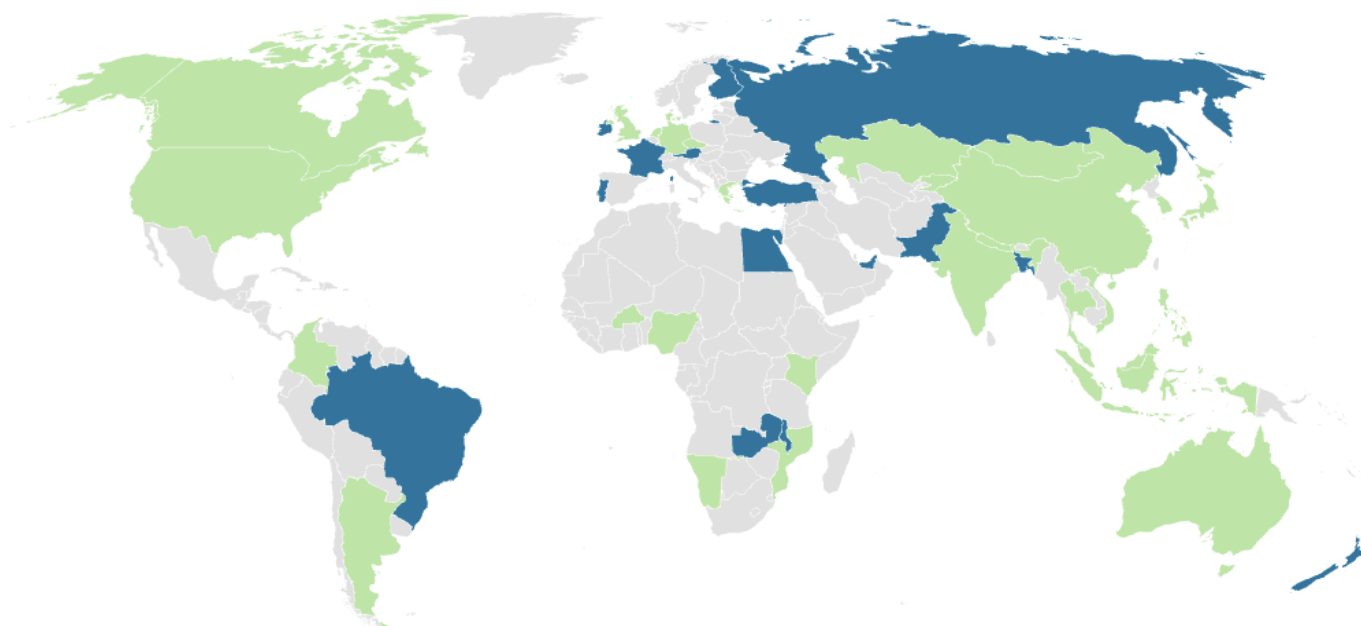
The 14th Global RCE Conference, held from 21–23 October 2025 in Okayama, Japan, marked a significant milestone in the 20-year journey of the Global RCE Network. Co-organised by the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU–IAS), RCE Okayama and Okayama City, and supported by the Ministry of the Environment of Japan and Okayama University, the conference brought together RCE members, educators, researchers, youth representatives and partners from across the world. 147 participants from 31 countries attended the Global RCE Conference in person, and 119 participants joined online, resulting in 266 participants overall. With the 16 countries represented exclusively by online participants, the conference reached participants from 47 countries in total (Figure 1).

Participants gathered to reflect on progress, share innovations and co-create the future direction of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), reinforcing the RCE Network’s role as a platform for collaboration and transformative learning towards a sustainable future. Hosted by RCE Okayama — an internationally recognized hub for ESD and acknowledged in 2005 as one of the seven initial RCEs worldwide — the conference celebrated two decades of RCE achievements while launching the 20-Year RCE Publication titled, [Learning, Collaborating and Transforming: The 20-Year Journey of the Global RCE Network](#). Through plenary discussions, thematic sessions, workshops and field visits, participants explored how RCEs have advanced action-oriented, community-based learning and contributed to systemic change in their regions and localities. A major outcome of the conference was the adoption of [The 2025 Okayama Declaration: RCEs’ Collective Commitment for Sustainable Futures](#), a renewed collective commitment to accelerating transformative education for people and the planet.

This report provides a summary of the plenary and breakout sessions and field visits, including the main discussions, insights, and key takeaways. The concept note, programme, and the profiles of moderators and presenters are available [here](#), while the recorded livestream of the plenary sessions can be accessed [here](#). The presentation files and the list of poster presentations are also available [here](#).

All in all, the conference was successful as indicated by the post-event evaluation by participants: 97% of the participants highly satisfied/satisfied with the overall conference and 99% strongly agree/agree that the conference was relevant to their current needs. The full results of the post-event survey can be found in the [Annex](#).

Figure 1: Countries of Conference Participants



Countries of Participants: In-person			Countries of Participants: Online Only	
Argentina	Indonesia*	Japan*	Austria	Türkiye
Burkina Faso	Kazakhstan	Netherlands*	Bangladesh	United Arab Emirates
Canada*	Kenya*	Nigeria*	Brazil	Russian Federation
China*	Kyrgyzstan	Philippines*	Egypt	Seychelles
Colombia*	Malaysia*	Republic of Korea*	Finland	Zambia
Australia*	Mongolia	Spain*	France	
Costa Rica	Mozambique	Thailand	Ireland	
Denmark	Namibia	United Kingdom	Malawi	
India*	Nepal*	United States of America*	New Zealand	
	Germany*	Vietnam	Pakistan	
	Greece		Portugal	

*Countries with both in-person and online participants are marked with *.*

Day 1: 21 October 2025

Opening Session

The Opening Session of the 14th Global RCE Conference began with an inspiring calligraphy performance by students from Okayama Higashi Commercial High School, symbolizing creativity, collaboration and the youthful energy that inspire the vision of a sustainable future. This performance set a celebratory tone for the conference, which commemorated the 20th anniversary of the Global RCE Network.

Tshilidzi Marwala, Rector of the United Nations University (UNU), opened the session by welcoming participants from around the world and reflecting on the RCE movement's journey from seven initial Regional Centres in 2005 to 200 today. He highlighted that this growth represents not only expansion but the strengthening of partnerships translating global visions into local actions. Drawing upon the Ubuntu philosophy — “I am because we are” — he underscored education's role as a transformative force fostering empathy, wisdom and collective responsibility.

Masao Omori, Mayor of Okayama City, extended a warm welcome on behalf of the city's 710,000 citizens and expressed appreciation to UNU-IAS, the Okayama ESD Promotion Commission, and partner institutions for their collaboration. He noted that the conference provides a meaningful opportunity for RCEs to exchange experiences and strengthen ties beyond national borders, while inviting participants to enjoy Okayama's rich culture and hospitality.

Kazutaka Kurobe, Director, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry's Secretariat, Office of Environmental Education, congratulated the RCE community on two decades of achievements and reaffirmed Japan's continued commitment to advancing ESD in partnership with UNU-IAS. He emphasized that the 20th anniversary marks both a milestone and a renewed call to action as the RCE Roadmap 2021–2030 reaches its midpoint, encouraging stronger interregional collaboration towards achieving the SDGs.

Launch of the 20-Year RCE Publication

The session marked a milestone celebrating two decades of the Global RCE Network with the launch of a new publication, [*Learning, Collaborating and Transforming: The 20-Year Journey of the Global RCE Network*](#).

Shinobu Yume Yamaguchi, Director of UNU-IAS, introduced the book.

The publication traces the evolution of the RCE movement, highlighting its global achievements, regional milestones and future directions. It features 10 case studies aligned with the *ESD for 2030* Priority Action Areas and analyses trends from 383 RCE projects implemented between 2020 and 2024, comparing them with those conducted during 2015–2019, the period of the Global Action Programme on ESD (GAP).

She acknowledged 37 contributors, including Regional Advisors, Regional Youth Coordinators and representatives from the UNU, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and the International Association of Universities (IAU). She also expressed her deep appreciation to the Ministry of the Environment of Japan and Ubuntu Committee of Peers for the RCE Community for its long-standing support, partnership and cooperation, which has been instrumental in the network's growth and success. She encouraged RCE members and participants to continue their reflection, collaboration and collective commitment to a sustainable future.

Introduction to the Conference

Miki Konishi, Programme Coordinator of the Innovation and Education Programme at UNU-IAS, opened the conference by introducing the concept, scope and evolution of the Global RCE Network. She highlighted RCEs as mechanisms that translate global sustainability goals into local action, functioning as multi-stakeholder networks that promote a community-wide and holistic approach to ESD. She emphasized that RCEs serve as innovative platforms and living laboratories that facilitate transformative learning and interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral and intergenerational collaboration.

Participants were invited to reflect on the remarkable growth of the network — from seven RCEs in 2005 to 200 across the world today — positioning the Global RCE Network as an expansive global learning space for ESD. Konishi also outlined the central objectives of the conference: celebrating the network's 20-year milestone, fostering shared reflection, learning from diverse RCE experiences, strengthening collaboration and adopting the 2025 Okayama Declaration. Expected outcomes — including the 20-Year RCE publication, enhanced partnerships and a renewed collective commitment — were presented as key steps toward shaping the next chapter of RCE engagement for sustainable futures.

Keynote 1: The 20-Year Transformational Journey of RCE and Communiversality Development

Mario Tabucanon opened the session by introducing **Dzul kifli Abdul Razak (Dzul)**, Founder of RCE Penang and RCE Greater Gombak in Malaysia, as a pioneering leader of the RCE movement, whose long-standing commitment to advancing sustainability in higher education has significantly shaped RCE development over two decades.

In his keynote, Dzul reflected on the RCE journey as one defined by transformation — multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder, holistic and deeply rooted in community-based learning. He introduced the concept of the **Communiversality**, an approach that positions communities and universities as equal partners, grounded in the Indigenous *Sejahtera* philosophy. This worldview places emphasis on balance, harmony and well-being, offering a meaningful alternative to dominant industrial models of education.

Reflecting on the 80th anniversary of the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, he stressed the importance of integrating peace within sustainability efforts, particularly through SDG 16. He linked this moment to the broader shift from the Holocene to the Anthropocene, urging a re-evaluation of civilization and its value systems.

He contrasted the industrial-era *3M* paradigm — Manpower, Mind, Machine (Hi-Tech) — with a more humanizing 21st-century model of *3H*: Humanity, Heart and High Touch. This shift calls for education infused with sympathy, empathy, compassion and a sense of shared humanity. Dzul also outlined seven developmental steps toward sustainability, including breaking down silos, building common platforms, strengthening community engagement and advancing Indigenous *Edu-Action* in which values are lived, not merely taught. A video showcased the *Communiversality* model in practice, demonstrating co-learning, co-creation and direct community impact through real-world projects involving students, instructors and thousands of individuals from local communities.

In closing, Tabucanon thanked Prof. Dzul for his thought-provoking insights and visionary contribution, noting that his keynote set a powerful tone for the conference's discussions on transformation and sustainability.

Plenary Session 1: Regional Reflection — 20 Years of RCE

This plenary session invited the current and past leaders of the Global RCE Network and facilitated collective reflection on the key success factors for the ever-growing and self-sustaining network of community-based transformative ESD.

Presenters from each of the four regions — **Catherine Mbaisi** for Africa (representing Akpezi Ogbuigwe, Regional Advisor for Africa & the Middle East), and Regional Advisors **Roger Petry** (Americas), **Eun-Kyung Park** (Asia-Pacific) and **Betsy King** (Europe) — briefly shared the regional progress and growth since 2005 and their priority areas, demonstrating the diverse regional contexts of the Global RCE Network. For example, Americas and Europe shared their unique governance systems, RCE Americas Network (RCEAN)’s monthly meetings and RCE Europe’s monthly Connect mechanism. The Asia-Pacific has been the fastest growing region, with more than 40 per cent RCE members acknowledged from the region, while RCEs in Africa has shown its firm position as a regional hub for ESD.

In response to such regional growth, **Kazuhiko Takemoto**, the former Director of UNU-IAS and significant contributor to RCE development, identified three key engines for such remarkable growth for the last 20 years: 1) clear goals and concept of RCE to translate the global issues and agenda into local actions and solutions; 2) evolution of global frameworks (e.g. SDG), and realignments of RCE activities with those frameworks; and 3) leadership and legitimacy of UNU as the hosting and acknowledging body.

The session engaged the panel members further with a few key findings from the trend analysis of RCE projects between 2015–2019 and 2020–2024, drawn from the 20th anniversary RCE publication. One of them was the shift of leadership in carrying out RCE projects from universities to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While some advisors identified the potential reasons behind ongoing challenges in higher education sectors since the Covid-19 Pandemic, others saw the phenomena as an opportunity to introduce more grass-rooted and contextualized ESD practices. Another distinctive finding was on the emergence of SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) as a priority area among RCEs in all regions except for Africa in 2020–2024. Africa’s priority SDGs included SDG 13 (sustainable consumption and production), SDG 3 (health and well-being) and SDG 1 (no poverty).

The session was concluded with a vision statement for RCE from each regional advisor. It ranged from self-sustaining RCEs addressing local challenges (Africa), RCE being more than the sum of their parts (Europe), taking pioneering roles in bridging diverse communities embracing Indigenous knowledge (Americas), and reviving the community to be environmentally safe and sound (Asia-Pacific). Additionally, Takemoto shared his insightful vision that “In 10 years, the current RCE regional youth coordinators will play leading roles and contribute to global ESD communities in their respective professional capacities”.

Plenary Session 2: Local Lessons for Broader Change: Building Sustainable Societies Through Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration

The second plenary session explored the critical role of local multi-stakeholder collaboration in advancing ESD within the RCE Global network and beyond. Panelists from diverse sectors and geographies reflected on both opportunities and complexities of working across sectoral boundaries based on their local realities. The discussion highlighted specific practical approaches to fostering effective multi-stakeholder collaboration and generated ideas for how these partnerships need to be reimagined to build sustainable societies. This session asked, “As we look ahead, what practices in multi-stakeholder collaboration both within and between RCEs should we keep, stop or introduce to advance ESD and drive societal change?”

Saki Kaneda from RCE Okayama shared her experience in the presentation “How to Collaborate with UNESCO ASPnet in Okayama”. As a former student and current teacher at one of the local schools participating in

UNESCO's Associated Schools Network (ASPnet), she emphasized the importance of moving beyond knowledge-sharing in classrooms and focusing on developing students' critical thinking skills through project-based learning.

In his presentation "Translating Academic Knowledge into Real-World Solutions" **Abdul Husaini** from RCE Minna, reflected on how academic research can be used to create practical solutions for communities on the ground. He particularly stressed the key role of participatory approaches that center community voices and solution-oriented research that creates knowledge that lives in communities, not just in classrooms.

David Zandvliet from RCE British Columbia discussed in his presentation "Infusing Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Action Across the Curriculum", how to collaborate with local and Indigenous communities and build sustainable futures that leave no one behind. He highlighted key principles that should guide such efforts, particularly: 1) sharing the lead with Indigenous communities; 2) consulting broadly and having many partners; and 3) acknowledging diversity and respecting differences.

Heleentje Swart from RCE Fryslân shared the initiative's approach to building cooperation between entrepreneurs and educators. Her presentation titled "SPARK The Movement" also highlighted the whole-region approach promoted by RCE Fryslân which underscores the importance of reviving local economies, offering training and work opportunities for youth and reinvigorating regions affected by depopulation and internal migration.

Dominik Sprenger from RCE Hangzhou, reflected in his presentation titled "From Project to Structure — Embedding ESD in Zhejiang's Teacher Training System", on what has and has not worked in implementing teacher training programmes in China. He shared key takeaways, such as the importance of localizing global ideas, recognizing the critical role NGOs play in connecting schools with society and acknowledging that teachers remain key multipliers for lasting change.

During an interactive discussion, the participants reported that they find local governments and the private sector the most difficult sectors to work with (45 per cent of the respondents). Reflecting on this, the panelists stressed the importance of creating opportunities for entrepreneurs and educators to meet and share mutual interests to build trust and align priority areas. This approach ensures that both sectors can see long-term benefits of their mutual collaboration. Additionally, the speakers emphasized effective communication with governments, stressing that attracting funding opportunities often depends on the ability of a certain project to offer solutions to the problems local governments are facing.

One of the key takeaways that emerged from the session was the importance of equipping youth and communities with resources, training and finding opportunities to ensure their meaningful participation in serving not just as beneficiaries of sustainability solutions, but as co-creators and co-owners. For that, education needs to be reimaged, to be more practical, to incorporate outdoor learning and to foster community engagement.

ESD Okayama Award 2025 Ceremony

Okayama City and **RCE Okayama** (Okayama ESD Promotion Commission) jointly hosted the ESD Okayama Award 2025 Ceremony, welcoming representatives from the organizations selected for this year's Award in recognition of their outstanding ESD initiatives. Each awardee received a certificate of commendation and a prize certificate of USD 3,000, presented by the Mayor of Okayama City and the Chair of RCE Okayama. The ceremony included presentations from the award-winning organizations, with simultaneous Japanese interpretation provided to ensure that local residents could fully engage with and learn from the showcased initiatives.

The ESD Okayama Award recognizes outstanding projects that advance ESD in local communities and demonstrate potential as global models. Established in 2015, the Award is coordinated by Okayama City and the ESD Okayama Award Steering Board, comprised of UNU-IAS, UNESCO Bangkok, the Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre

for UNESCO (ACCU), the Japan Council on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD-J), The Goi Peace Foundation, and the Okayama ESD Promotion Commission. In its 11th year in 2025, the Award received a record 346 applications from 81 countries, demonstrating its growing global visibility and the increasing momentum for community-based ESD worldwide. The following two initiatives were selected for the Award in 2025:

- **EduMobile: The Ombombo Mobile Environmental Education**
EduVentures Trust (Namibia)

Since 2014, EduVentures, the educational outreach programme of the National Museum of Namibia, has operated EduMobile, a mobile environmental education initiative that delivers experiential learning to underserved school communities across the country.

The judges commended the project for its strong integration of theory and practice through multiple learning channels, its meaningful inclusion of marginalized and out-of-school youth and its effectiveness as a community-based ESD model achieved through collaboration with government authorities and local partners.

- **CUNbre — Territorial Learning Incubator for Youth-Led Sustainable Solutions**
National Unified Corporation of Higher Education (Colombia)

Since 2021, the National Unified Corporation of Higher Education has implemented CUNbre, an educational incubator linking secondary education with technical training and supporting young people in developing sustainable, locally driven solutions. The programme enables students to progress to higher education or transform their ideas into operational community projects.

The judges highlighted the programme's innovative approach to empowering youth to identify local challenges and launch impactful sustainability initiatives. They also recognized its strong action-oriented learning framework, which integrates economic, social and environmental dimensions in alignment with ESD principles.

Participants engaged actively with the presenters, raising questions about aspects such as site selection, programme structure and community engagement. Audience reflections were visualized through a real-time word cloud, illustrating strong impressions of the innovative, community-based activities showcased. The session underscored the importance of learning from exemplary ESD practices and inspired participants to consider how such approaches could be adapted within their own contexts. The ceremony reaffirmed that opportunities to learn from global models are essential for fostering behavioural change and cultivating more sustainable communities.

RCE Awards 2025 Presentation Ceremony

RCE Awards 2025 Ceremony recognizes outstanding contributions to ESD across RCEs globally. The session was introduced by **Kozue Tatsuhara**, Programme Associate at UNU-IAS, who highlighted the long-standing purpose of the Awards to celebrate innovative ESD practices that empower learners and communities, strengthen multi-stakeholder collaboration and contribute to sustainable development. RCE Awards have served as a platform to spotlight transformative projects implemented by RCEs around the world. RCE Award 2025 placed particular emphasis on initiatives demonstrating practical impact, community engagement and the integration of ESD principles into real-world change. In addition to the long-established category recognizing non-youth-led flagship projects, this year's Awards featured a category dedicated to youth-led initiatives, celebrating the leadership and creativity of young changemakers under the age of 35.

Four categories were presented for the Outstanding Flagship Project award: non-youth-led project and youth-led project. These recognitions reflect the diversity, innovation and dedication across the RCE community and underscore the power of locally driven solutions to contribute to global sustainability goals.

The ceremony concluded with closing remarks by **Shinobu Yume Yamaguchi**, Director of UNU-IAS, who congratulated the Award recipients and commended RCEs for their continued commitment to advancing ESD. She highlighted the importance of fostering inclusive, community-based learning and reaffirmed UNU-IAS' commitment to supporting the Global RCE Network in scaling impactful initiatives for the next decade and beyond.

Day 2: 22 October 2025

Introduction to Day 2

The second day of the conference opened with a warm reflection on the energy and achievements of Day 1, acknowledging the inspiring student performance, keynote speech, plenary sessions and the rich discussions that set the tone for commemorating 20 years of RCE action. **Miki Konishi** highlighted how the insights and energy shared throughout the first day reaffirmed the Global RCE Network's spirit of collaboration, inclusivity and community-driven learning. She then introduced the Day 2 programme, outlining the sessions designed to deepen collective reflection, strengthen partnerships and explore practical pathways for advancing ESD across regions.

She concluded her introduction by returning to a message delivered during the opening performance by high school students: "Each of our small actions can shape our better future. Let us bring smiles for our planet. Let's act together for a future where no one is left behind, and for the dreams we wish to fulfill." She emphasized that this call for hope and shared responsibility beautifully reflects the essence of the RCE movement as participants embark on the day's sessions and discussions.

Keynote 2: Education for Sustainability Starts the Moment You are Born, Wherever You are Born

Keynote Speech 2 was delivered by **Her Royal Highness Princess Abze Djigma**, a Mossi Princess from Burkina Faso whose work bridges global climate policy with the lived realities of local communities. As Co-Chair of the UNFCCC Paris Committee on Capacity-Building and Founder of the MAMA-LIGHT® for Sustainable Energy initiative, she has long championed inclusive and people-centred development. The session was moderated by **Mario Tabucanon**.

Princess Abze opened by thanking the hosts and recognising the long-standing contributions of RCEs. She emphasised that her royal title carries responsibility — "First is the people, and last is the people." Drawing on her kingdom's centuries-old leadership tradition, she stressed that education for sustainability begins even before birth, as children absorb values, culture and their environment from the earliest stages of life. Communities, she noted, share foundational principles embedded in their DNA.

She encouraged participants to "dare to think the unthinkable," noting that throughout history, innovators have often faced resistance. She argued that universities should adopt more action-oriented roles, directly linking knowledge to the needs of communities and society. She also stressed the importance of clear and simple communication so that policies and scientific concepts are easily understood and can be translated into action at the local level. She highlighted the role of elders as powerful experts with deep nature-based knowledge, and youth as society's greatest asset. Further, Princess Abze added that technology, when paired with creativity and solidarity, can drive meaningful transformation.

A video introduced the MAMA-LIGHT® initiative, which provides affordable solar lamps to rural communities. In villages near Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso, solar lighting has enabled children to study at night and supported families. Princess Abze highlighted in the video that such community-driven solutions reflect a new face of Burkina Faso, one that recognizes its own potential and is shaped by solutions created for the people and by the people.

During the Q&A, participants raised questions about the role of universities, how to motivate youth and engage traditional leaders. Princess Abze stressed that innovation is accelerated by policies that are simple, people-centred and supported by strong legal frameworks that empower communities and build investor confidence. She

also underscored the importance of role models, critical thinking and perseverance in inspiring young people, reminding them that “the future is in your hands.” In discussing traditional leadership, she highlighted the values of trust, humility and service embodied by African royal houses — principles reflected in the Burkindi philosophy and advanced through the Mutirão and Burkindi Coalition Capacity Building Initiative.

Prof. Tabucanon closed the session by thanking Princess Abze for her inspiring reflections and noting that her keynote strongly echoed core RCE principles, including lifelong learning “from birth to the end of life.”

Plenary Session 3: *I am _____, Youth from RCE _____*: Mobilizing the Youth for Global Transformation Through Problem-Based Approaches to ESD

Plenary Session 3, titled “*I am _____, Youth from RCE _____: Mobilizing the Youth for Global Transformation Through Problem-Based Approaches to ESD*” highlighted youth-led, problem-based approaches for addressing environmental, social and institutional challenges through ESD. Featuring practical insights from Regional Youth Coordinators, the session illustrated how young people drive problem-based learning to drive real-world solutions in their communities using multi-stakeholder collaboration. It also underscored the value of intergenerational cooperation in advancing sustainable development. The session showcased concrete examples of youth initiatives that move beyond raising awareness to creating measurable impact and transferable models for sustainability transformation.

Maximilian Eisenbart from RCE Fryslân, former RCE Regional Youth Coordinator for Europe, opened the session by outlining its objectives and introducing the project team. The interactive segment, facilitated by **Seoyoung Joo**, intern at UNU-IAS, emphasized the role of trust in strengthening intergenerational collaboration. Participants reflected on how mutual respect across generations is essential for fostering effective cooperation in advancing ESD.

Woojin Lee from RCE Tongyeong, serving as a RCE Regional Youth Coordinator for the Asia-Pacific, presented the long-standing initiative Bridge to the World. She highlighted the importance of grounding activities in real-world questions and using a reflection cycle to understand the local–global connections in addressing sustainability challenges. She also shared her personal transition from a project participant to assistant programme designer, demonstrating how continuity and hands-on engagement can drive sustained action.

Janu Muhammad from RCE Yogyakarta, serving as a RCE Regional Youth Coordinator for the Asia-Pacific, shared current sustainability challenges in Indonesia and highlighted his youth-led initiative on smart agriculture to address climate change. His project aims to empower young people in the agricultural sector by equipping them with green skills. Through mentoring and coaching, he demonstrated the importance of youth empowerment and showcased the significant impact of his initiative.

Evance Ouya from RCE South Rift, serving as the RCE Regional Youth Coordinator for the Africa, discussed how to save mammal diversity in Narok in Kenya by preventing climate change. Through the youth and school project, particularly tree growing and creating an eco-stove production, he demonstrated how building the capacity of young people can drive meaningful conservation efforts and long-term climate resilience.

Héctor Esparra-Escalera from RCE Detroit-Windsor, serving as a RCE Regional Youth Coordinator for Americas, presented youth-led initiatives focused on urban waste management. He emphasized the importance of youth engagement in advancing a practical circular economy approach, particularly by reframing waste as a valuable resource. Through hands-on composting activities integrated into school curricula and community workshops, he demonstrated how such initiatives strengthen youth capacities and encourage their active participation in policy dialogue.

Alyson MacKay from RCE Scotland, serving as a RCE Regional Youth Coordinator for Europe, elaborated on an intergenerational film screenings project designed to bridge the gap between generations in understanding the climate and biodiversity issues across rural and urban areas of Scotland. By facilitating intergenerational group discussion on topics such as deforestation, apex predators, wetlands and the future of wildlife, the project creates shared learning spaces and is able to deepen community-driven responses to environmental challenges.

Ahmad Ali Karim from RCE Greater Gombak, serving as an RCE Regional Youth Coordinator for the Asia-Pacific region, facilitated dialogue among the presenters. Through the discussion, participants explored practical ways to bridge diverse regional experiences and examined how youth leadership can serve as a force for sustained transformation in advancing ESD.

Kozue Tatsuhara, Programme Associate at UNU-IAS, concluded the session by highlighting six key qualities observed in the projects led by RCE Regional Youth Coordinators: intergenerational collaboration, intergenerational learning, intrinsic motivation, real-world questioning, evidence-based decision-making and interdisciplinary thinking. She emphasized that these qualities are essential for empowering youth to lead community-based projects effectively and to drive transformative change.

Breakout Sessions I: Thematic Presentations by RCEs

Breakout Session 1: Advancing Policy

Objectives

The breakout session explored how RCEs are shaping policy frameworks and educational practices to advance sustainability, highlighting the interplay between top-down policymaking and bottom-up community-driven initiatives. The session was moderated by **Zainal Abidin Bin Sanusi** from RCE Greater Gombak.

Insights from the Session

David Rangan from RCE Denmark presented the Biobased Building Guidance, TVET and Beyond initiative, which embeds sustainability into technical and vocational education and training. He emphasized the need to transition from problem-based to solution-oriented learning that equips learners with practical skills for sustainable construction. He also highlighted the importance of political dialogue, stakeholder collaboration and connecting scientific knowledge to legislation and market forces. Describing the initiative as a bottom-up movement capable of influencing policy innovation and broader systemic change, he underscored the value of engaging skeptics and grounding sustainability discussions in real-world evidence.

Betsy King and Kirsten Leask from RCE Scotland reflected on their long-standing efforts to integrate ESD into Scotland's national education system. Through continuous collaboration with the government, the RCE has shaped policy instruments such as the National Framework for Initial Teacher Education, national professional learning programmes, and Scotland's National Action Plan for ESD. They underscored that political advocacy, even in small steps, helps to keep ESD visible within the government. A major priority has been youth engagement, particularly through partnerships with Students Organising for Sustainability (SOS)-UK's Teach the Future, ensuring young people are involved meaningfully in policy processes and aligned with Scotland's commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

David Zandvliet from RCE British Columbia-North Cascades offered a perspective on reframing environmental learning through Indigenous worldviews. In biodiversity-rich regions managed by Indigenous peoples, he argued that environmental learning must emphasize reciprocity, responsibility and relationality. His work encourages shifting educators' roles from lecturers to coaches who support students in active inquiry. Zandvliet stressed the need for legal and policy commitments to embed Indigenous knowledge into curricula and highlighted ongoing collaborations with ministries of education.

Jung Hee Sung from RCE Tongyeong discussed Republic of Korea's ESD history and the persistent "awareness–action gap." She argued that RCEs must move beyond awareness-raising toward action-oriented and transformative learning. Through RCE Tongyeong's Living Lab initiatives, she demonstrated how collaborative spaces enable co-creation, experiential learning and adaptive transformation, strengthening partnerships with both local and national governments.

Takeaways

Across all presentations, the session emphasized that advancing policy for sustainability requires multi-level collaboration, meaningful youth participation, integration of scientific and Indigenous knowledge systems and the creation of participatory learning environments. The moderator concluded the session by highlighting the importance of linking ground-level action with innovative learning approaches across the Global RCE Network.

Breakout Session 2: Transforming Learning Environment

Objectives

The session's main objective was to examine how RCEs are transforming learning environments in three contexts: an RCE in the Netherlands (RCE Fryslân) and two in Malaysia (RCE Penang and RCE Greater Gombak). The session was moderated by **Roger A. Petry**, RCE Regional Advisor for Americas.

Insights from the Session

Helena Stewart and Maximilian Eisenbart from RCE Fryslân discussed Spark the Movement in the Netherlands which has the overarching goal of creating a circular economy. Through the Week of the Region, an annual multi-level hackathon, the RCE addresses complex regional challenges by involving students, teachers and community and business leaders. Teachers sign up to involve their classrooms, getting training well in advance to guide their teams through these discussions. There is a mutual dependency for success; students need multi-sector partners to learn, and business needs to learn the sustainability dimensions of the problem in question. They also noted that integrating the programme into the curriculum remains challenging, requiring early teacher involvement.

Japareng Lalung discussed RCE Penang's goal of conservation and rebuilding mangrove forests. This requires multi-sectoral engagement, first educating forestry management related to mangroves, followed by replanting and sustaining the replanted trees. Community members get seedlings and prepare the space for planting; young students then plant the seedlings in order to create a sense of ownership and belonging; signage is placed on each tree so students can see its growth over time. There are forest visits with learning hubs created that include specific videos and books that have been developed. A key challenge he highlighted is that success is often measured by trees planted, rather than trees surviving, requiring long-term monitoring.

Muhaideen Abdul Kader Bin Mohamad Ikbal (Brodeen) from RCE Greater Gombak reported the RCE's strategy to support families in an economically challenged area of Kuala Lumpur. The project seeks to address social, economic and environmental aspects simultaneously through often small, yet highly personalized interventions. These include food coupons, leadership training, coding camps for children and experiential learning. The project

works with both schools and public libraries (bibliotherapy). He emphasized that combining academic support with personalized community engagement has strengthened trust and participation.

Takeaways

Key takeaways from all three case studies include the whole community approach needed to make change built upon empathy, partnerships and shared education. This education requires new approaches to engage learners, including collaborative learning and problem solving outside the classroom that is engaging, fun and personal. These new methods also require support for developing new knowledge, skills and capacities of teachers. Finally, universities have considerable flexibility in pioneering these new educational strategies as they can rapidly incorporate new resources into curricula and easily bring them into play in non-formal education strategies. Changing primary and secondary formal education curriculum remained more challenging in all three settings but would be valuable over the long term.

Breakout Session 3: Building Capacities of Educators

Objectives

The session explored how ESD can strengthen teaching and learning by equipping educators — within schools and across communities — with competencies, structures and partnerships needed to drive sustainability action. Presenters from teacher education institutions, environmental learning centres, municipal education boards and community-based organizations shared practical models illustrating how educator capacity-building can bridge formal education, community engagement and local sustainability challenges. The session was moderated by **Munirah Ghazali**, RCE Regional Advisor for Asia-Pacific

Insights from the Session

Rika Iwami from RCE Hyogo–Kobe shared how youth leadership is cultivated through a comprehensive Glocal Inquiry-Based Learning Programme, implemented in a public high school in Kobe. By empowering students to tackle real-world issues and by equipping teachers with inquiry-based pedagogical skills, the school contributes to a broader shift toward community-connected, future-oriented ESD practice in Hyogo–Kobe.

Unji Lee from RCE Tongyeong presented a compelling example of how educator capacity can be strengthened beyond formal school settings through a community-centred model grounded in marine sustainability. RCE Tongyeong developed the On-site Education for Responsible Fishing programme, which reframes community members as active educators and environmental stewards. It also highlights the importance of behavioural change strategies that are participatory, enjoyable and culturally grounded.

Tomonori Ichinose from RCE Greater Sendai introduced a whole-district perspective on educator capacity-building through a systemic, long-term governance approach. The Greater Sendai region, shaped by its history of disaster risk, has systematically integrated ESD and disaster risk reduction (DRR) across grade levels, supported by ICT tools and inquiry processes that help students connect disaster literacy with daily life. By aligning all schools under shared ESD priorities and providing stable, repeated opportunities for teacher upskilling, the district demonstrates how coordinated governance and university partnerships sustain educator development over decades.

Jana Dlouhá from RCE Czechia presented an innovative approach to educator capacity-building through the long-established School for Sustainable Living, a nationwide programme involving almost 300 schools across the Czech Republic. Grounded in place-based and participatory methodologies, the programme equips teachers to transition from traditional instruction to facilitative, student-centred approaches that foster agency and community engagement.

Key Takeaways:

The session reaffirmed that strengthening educator capacity is fundamental to advancing transformative ESD. Effective models blend experiential learning, community partnerships and institutional support to move education beyond transmissive approaches. By empowering teachers, communities, youth and local organizations as co-educators, ESD can nurture active citizenship, strengthen local resilience, and catalyze sustained collective action toward the SDGs.

Breakout Session 4: Empowering and Mobilizing Youth

Objectives

The purpose of the session was to highlight and provide room for discussion on youth-led initiatives and youth leadership in sustainability in general. Panelled by five youth initiators from four countries, the session covered projects and initiatives pertaining to a wide range of fields, from rehabilitation and empowerment to wildlife conservation, and even intergenerational communication. The session showcased four impactful projects which proves that the youth can lead the change towards a brighter future from small to big steps moving forward. The session was moderated by **Ahmad Ali Karim**, RCE Regional Youth Coordinator for Asia-Pacific

Insights from the Session

Ibrahim Akibu Ja'afaru from RCE Minna presented on their youth empowerment programme, where they help problematic youth who are involved in thuggery, drug addiction, and other social issues since a young age. After rehabilitation to bring them back to the right path, the youths are turned from being the problem within the society to the solution for a sustainable society by becoming the region's agents of change. They are taught how to lead sustainability projects themselves and further help improve the generation.

Yun Seo Heo and **Yoo Jung Lee** from RCE Dobong-gu presented their heartwarming project which involves engaging with the older generation within their RCE. Bringing together many youth members of the community, they not only sit down together with the older generations to listen their stories, but also write them down and publish them online to share with a wider audience. This addresses the important issue of generational gap which is something faced by a lot of communities across the world, while also helping the individual seniors in their RCE, some of whom are starting to suffer conditions such as dementia.

Brittany Vermeulen from RCE Greater Western Sydney proved that the endangered wildlife still has a chance for a brighter future thanks to youth initiatives to improve the liveability of their natural habitats. By engaging with the youth communities across the region, they were able to help the platypuses live a better life.

Satomi Goto from RCE Hyogo-Kobe seeks to address multiple issues pertaining to inclusivity in the region. People who suffer from certain diseases have a problem getting proper treatment at hospitals due to negative stigmas surrounding them. A similar issue is faced by disabled people who are often mistreated in the society. Their project tackles both problems by getting disabled youth volunteers to help these patients feel more at home when receiving treatments.

Takeaways

The session concluded that youth empowerment does not only come in the form of merely giving the platform for youths to step forward, but more importantly preparing and motivating them to lead the future on their own, encouraging critical thinking and a positive outlook despite the challenges they face.

Breakout Session 5: Fostering Innovation in ESD with Emerging Technologies

Objectives

This session aimed to highlight practical solutions that integrate technology, collaboration and experiential learning to localise the SDGs and drive measurable social and environmental impact. It also sought to demonstrate strategies that empower learners and communities to address sustainability challenges, foster behavioural change and promote equitable access to quality education. The session was moderated by **Avelino Jr. Mejia**, Communications Associate, UNU-IAS.

Insights from the Session

Vasiliki Kioupi from RCE London introduced the Social Justice Jam, an innovative, fast-paced learning event designed to foster transformative education for a sustainable future. Drawing on the institutional context of the University of Leeds, the SDGs, and theoretical foundations of challenge-based learning and human-centred design, the Jam brought together diverse participants from the Global North and South to collaboratively address social justice challenges through creative, experiential approaches. Key highlights included co-designed activities, strong student engagement, localization of SDGs and outcomes emphasizing empowerment, knowledge exchange, and community-driven solutions. The presentation also shared evaluation insights, Open Educational Resources (OER) created during the Jam, and plans for future initiatives.

Tran Thi Ngoc Diep and **Nguyen Thao Thuc Tran** from RCE Southern Vietnam presented AGreenChoice, a sustainability impact platform developed with International University, Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City. The platform supports the integration of ESD into curricula, promotes social entrepreneurship and advances research aligned with the SDGs. It encourages waste management practices through community engagement, action-oriented pedagogies and smart technologies, empowering students, staff and communities as sustainability ambassadors. A live demonstration showed how users can register, scan QR codes, earn points and redeem rewards, illustrating its practical role in driving behavioural change and measurable environmental impact.

Hao Xin from RCE Hangzhou featured Sci2U Angels, an initiative providing equitable, high-quality science education for youth in primary and secondary schools in China. The project addresses major imbalances in science education, including urban–rural gaps and limited practical learning opportunities, and seeks to build educator capacity and transform learning environments. The programme connects scientists with schools, promotes hands-on, inquiry-based learning and aligns with national policies. Reported outcomes include improved student engagement, educator training and institutional reforms, contributing to educational equity and sustainable development.

The ensuing Q&A focused largely on the Social Justice Jam, with questions on accessibility, collaboration and inclusivity. Kioupi highlighted that all resources are freely available as Open Educational Resources, enabling democratic access and adaptation in local contexts. On youth engagement, she noted active involvement from university students and local communities, supported by facilitator training to address power imbalances and create accountable spaces for equal participation. This approach strengthened leadership skills and informed the development of a model framework for embedding such practices into academic programmes. Further discussion linked the Jam to ESD principles, emphasizing transformative learning, collaboration and sustainability competencies. Kioupi also outlined the three-day structure and flexibility of the model, noting that a detailed handbook is available for replication.

Takeaways

Key takeaways of the breakout session include 1) emerging technologies can serve as powerful enablers for inclusive action; 2) achieving scalability and sustainability requires multi-level collaboration and strong institutional support; and 3) technology should complement, not replace, human connection and community-

based learning. Participants also emphasized motivation, openness and leveraging digital tools such as AI for capacity building.

Parallel Poster Presentations

The Poster Presentation session highlighted innovative ESD initiatives from across the Global RCE Network and organizations promoting ESD in Japan. A total of 36 exhibitors, including 12 RCEs, as well as member organizations from RCE Okayama and other domestic institutions, presented diverse projects on climate action, biodiversity conservation, water education, youth leadership and community empowerment. The session provided a platform for exchange, mutual learning and collaboration, enabling participants to explore practical, community-based approaches to sustainable development and to connect with emerging ESD efforts.

Breakout Sessions II: Capacity building & Workshops

Breakout Session 6: Learning beyond 2030: Weaving ESD across the Everyday

Organizers

RCE Scotland, RCE Fryslân and RCE Basque Country-Navarre

Objectives

We are living in a time of unprecedented, rapid change, with profound consequences for all life on Earth. Our current global frameworks and policies addressing these challenges, such as the UN SDGs (2015–2030), view transformative education and learning as essential. RCEs have been playing a vital role in translating these global policies into local action, working across all forms of education and learning through multistakeholder engagement. With 2030 approaching, this workshop invited participants to envision Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) beyond 2030. Using Futures Thinking approaches, we aimed to draw on participants' past and current experiences to envision the future contributions that RCEs can make towards a world where ESD is woven into everyday life for everyone.

Insights from the Session

Betsy King from RCE Scotland began with an interactive activity designed to help participants connect and learn together. Current global ESD-related frameworks, including UNESCO's ESD for 2030 Roadmap, Reimagining Our Futures Together, the RCE Roadmap 2021–2030, and the UN Pact for the Future, were introduced, and participants were invited to consider what else RCEs can contribute to ensuring that everyone can develop the knowledge, skills and capacities needed to create a more sustainable world.

Three short thought-provoking questions were offered by the organizing team, focusing on past and current RCE activities, uncertainties, and emerging opportunities.

Samuel Fernandez Diekert from RCE Basque Country–Navarre presented “The Heart of the Matter”, introducing the human dimension of sustainability and the Inner Development Goals. Following an interactive discussion, participants identified post-2030 educational core values as Empathy, Community, Creativity, Compassion and Cooperation.

Helena Swart from RCE Fryslân challenged participants to consider the approaches to education and learning that will truly equip students to become catalysts for change in their regions. Evidence from RCE Fryslân shows that highly effective learning for sustainability happens beyond school buildings, through interdisciplinary, place-based, experiential learning.

Kirsten Leask from RCE Scotland discussed the possibilities and challenges of creating a revolutionary “Movement for Change” towards learning for sustainability in education systems. Drawing on RCE Scotland's experience in supporting national ESD policies, Kirsten asked, “Is evolutionary change enough?” and “How can RCEs catalyse the transformative changes that are required?”

In group discussions introduced by **Maximilian Eisenbart** from RCE Fryslân and Kirsten Leask from RCE Scotland, participants reflected on their experiences of ESD implementation in formal, informal and non-formal learning to identify key factors shaping ESD in the future. They shared what worked well, what could be improved and what gaps, opportunities and challenges lie ahead. The key themes that emerged were: 1) innovation, knowledge exchange, and developing collaborative spaces; 2) governmental and stakeholder support; 3) sustaining RCE

vitality and vibrancy; 4) empowering and supporting educators; 5) influencing education policy and the global sustainability agenda; 6) digital literacy; 7) inclusion and leaving no one behind; 8) a unified global RCE voice and interconnection; 9) strengthening intergenerational collaboration; and 10) supporting youth engagement. Among these, Themes 2, 5 and 9 were selected for deeper exploration in world café-style discussions, where participants envisioned probable, possible and phenomenal futures beyond 2030.

Takeaways

This workshop provided a valuable opportunity to begin discussions that will shape RCEs' thinking and action on ESD post-2030, both individually and collectively. Futures Thinking approaches enable RCEs to engage stakeholders in envisioning phenomenal futures and developing innovative strategies to realize them. As we progress towards 2030, fostering ongoing dialogue and collaboration among RCEs globally will play a vital role in informing and shaping the future of ESD beyond 2030.

Breakout Session 7: Co-Creating a Sustainable Future from the Community: Building an Inclusive Society through ESD

Organizers

RCE Okayama, RCE Minna and Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU)

Objectives

This session explored how ESD can strengthen communities by empowering youth leadership, promoting intergenerational learning, and fostering trust-based collaboration. After the moderator's introduction by **Kiichi Oyasu**, Director, Education Cooperation Department, Asia-Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), speakers from Japan, the Philippines and Nigeria shared concrete examples of how inclusive community engagement can drive sustainable, transformative change.

Insights from the Session

Yuko Komaki from the Takashima Kominkan in Okayama introduced community challenges in an aging society and decreasing youth participation. She explained how Kominkan functions as an open space for lifelong and lifewide learning, connecting people of all ages. Five high school students from the Takashima Youth Volunteer Team shared their experiences in a community initiative launched in 2020. Through collaborative projects, such as local festivals and a “cardboard haunted house” for children, the community established a platform for intergenerational learning and civic participation. These activities demonstrated how community-based education can foster youth confidence and leadership while revitalizing local communities.

Qjiel Giuliano Mikhl Mariano from the Philippines shared examples of school-community collaboration, youth-led engagement and intergenerational learning. Partnerships among peers, the community and NGO contribute to sustainable development by addressing challenges related to poverty, health and education. He highlighted initiatives in the Manila North Cemetery, where children facing bullying and limited access to education are supported through creative literacy programmes. Storybook publishing projects co-led by children and grandparents exemplify inclusive, intergenerational learning environments.

Abdul Husaini from RCE Minna, Nigeria, introduced “When the City Listened: Using Dialogue and Dignity to Heal Youth Divides.” The initiative, known as The Sustainable Initiative for Responsible Adulthood (TSIRA), applies dialogue-driven methods to rebuild trust among youth and communities affected by conflict. Through in-depth discussions with gang members, parents and local officials, the project uncovered root causes, such as poverty, drug use and lack of opportunity, transforming former gang youths into peace advocates through skills training and

mentorship. His message — “Listening works; youth energy is not the problem but the solution” — underscored that inclusive dialogue can turn despair into dignity.

Takeaways

During the discussion, participants identified key elements for inclusive, community-driven ESD as follows:

- **Youth involvement:** Younger generations should actively participate in community development, leveraging intergenerational collaboration and appropriate technologies.
- **Intergenerational collaboration:** Participants emphasized the importance of sharing ideas and learning across generations to address social challenges.
- **Accessibility and engagement:** Sustainability conferences should be accessible and free to young people, including high school students, to encourage participation. Local youth initiatives, such as festival activities, help disseminate sustainability concepts.
- **Community facilities and best practices:** Understanding stakeholders’ needs and mapping key actors is crucial. Technologies can support communication and collaboration between younger and older generations and even connect people and communities beyond regional boundaries.
- **Trust and collaboration:** Building trust requires time, resources and mutual understanding. Effective multi-stakeholder collaboration is essential for sustainable development, with attention to minimizing power imbalances.

In conclusion, the session highlighted that sustainable communities thrive through dialogue, trust and shared learning across generations and continents. Connecting experiences from Japan, the Philippines and Nigeria, participants emphasized inclusive education, youth empowerment and collaboration as keys to co-creating resilient societies rooted in local leadership and lifelong learning.

Breakout Session 8: Planetary-Centered Universities at the Ethical Turn: Advancing ESD Beyond the SDGs for Human and Planetary Well-Being

Organizer

Okayama University

Objectives

The session explored the ethical frontiers of higher education amid converging planetary crises such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and inequality. These challenges were framed not only as scientific or political issues but as a crisis of values and worldview, calling for universities to redefine their mission in light of humanity’s interconnectedness with the Earth system.

Through cross-cultural dialogue, participants examined how universities can evolve into ethical ecosystems for planetary regeneration — institutions that integrate sustainability, ethics and intercultural competence into governance, research and civic engagement. The primary objective was to propel Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) beyond the SDGs towards the holistic well-being of humanity and the planet. This mission centered on fostering planetary citizenship, anchored in ecology, plurality and long-term care, by implementing a whole-institution approach to co-create multi-scale impact from local communities to the planetary sphere.

Insights from the Session

Facilitated by **Atsufumi Yokoi**, Vice President and UNESCO Chairholder in Research and Education for Sustainable Development at Okayama University, the discussion centered on redefining universities as moral agents in an age of ethical transition. **Rajani Naido**, Vice President and Deputy Vice-Chancellor for People and Culture, University of Exeter (United Kingdom), highlighted that higher education must confront its complicity in unsustainable socio-economic expansion and re-orient toward justice-based transformation. **Darla Deardorff**, UNESCO Chairholder on Intercultural Competence at Stellenbosch University (South Africa), emphasized intercultural competence as foundational to cultivating empathy, respect, and collaboration across cultures — qualities essential for planetary citizenship. **Julie Newman**, Director of Office of Sustainability at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), shared institutional experiences, stressing systems thinking and operational innovation designed to embed sustainability within university governance. This approach aimed to co-create a multi-scale impact, ranging from the individual and local levels to the campus, city, state, global, and planetary scales. **Ilan Enverga**, Youth Representative at the UN SDG4 High-Level Steering Committee, urged academia to embrace intergenerational dialogue and solidarity, and to support youth-led initiatives as key catalysts for ethical transformation. **Nazrya Tachiar Azla**, a Bachelor student at Okayama University, suggested how experiential and valued-based learnings enable students to become co-creators of change.

Throughout the dialogue, participants converged on the view that universities must be reimagined not merely knowledge producers and educational factories, but as ethically-configured institutional systems and living laboratories for the human and planetary well-being. Furthermore, they must transcend the anthropocentric model of growth that is fueled by market fundamentalism and overemphasis on competition. Accordingly, the concept of a planetary-centered university emerged as a new paradigm — one that nurtures moral imagination, cross-sectoral collaboration and long-term care for both people and the planet.

Takeaways

The session reaffirmed that sustainability transitions hinge on ethical transformation within higher education, emphasizing three key takeaways:

- Planetary society: Recognizing humanity as an integral component of Earth’s ecological system, essential for the well-being of both humanity and the planet.
- Planetary citizenship: Cultivating planetary consciousness, ethical awareness, empathy, intercultural understanding and long-term care. This shift prioritizes “Homo Symbioticus” over “Homo Economicus”.
- Planetary-centered universities: Reimagining universities as seeds of planetary flourishing. This is achieved by embedding ESD institution-wide and operationalizing planetary citizenship across institutional life to drive planetary regeneration.

Breakout Session 9: Green and Sustainable Learning – Sustainability Competencies and Pedagogies to Get Every Learner Climate Ready

Organizer

UNESCO

Objectives

This session focused on sharing UNESCO tools and frameworks to support sustainability and greening education, namely the Greening Curriculum Guidance, as well as highlighting some practical examples for integrating sustainability competencies and greening topics into teaching and learning activities. The session was co-

facilitated by **Mark Manns**, Project Officer with the Section of Education for Sustainable Development at UNESCO, and **Hiroki Fuji**, Professor of Science Education in the Graduate School of Education at Okayama University.

Insights from the Session

The session started with an ice-breaker activity to understand sustainability competencies. The participants were randomly issued flash cards with 15 sustainability competencies, such as futures thinking, critical thinking and integrated problem solving, as well as 15 cards with the definitions of each competency. The participants were asked to match the competency and definition.

Following this, Manns gave an introductory presentation on the approaches and strategies for integrating sustainability and greening education, for example, focusing on a whole-institution approach, addressing three learning domains (cognitive, socioemotional, behavioural), and sharing some of the available tools and guidance materials that UNESCO offers.

This was followed by Fujii sharing some examples of approaches and practices that educators have been using to ensure that learning is inquiry-based, participatory and collaborative, and interdisciplinary. He provided several examples from projects that he has supported in Japan, where teachers have integrated these approaches.

The participants were introduced to the six concepts and topics in the Green Curriculum Guidance. They were then divided into four groups where they were tasked with designing a learning activity based on a specific greening topic or concept, utilizing one or more of the pedagogical approaches and including specific sustainability competencies as part of the learning outcomes.

The groups collaborated to prepare a sample lesson plan or learning activity, which ranged from civic participation and resiliency for climate action, critical thinking on sustainable transportation, systems thinking through exploring the water cycle, and changing behaviours regarding sustainable consumption and lifestyles.

Takeaways

The session concluded with each group presenting their lesson plans for teaching students in schools. During the session, participants wanted to understand whether they need to integrate all competencies and approaches, or how best to integrate these in their activities. It was emphasized that this is not necessary; rather, the goal is to adopt a holistic, participatory and interdisciplinary approach that provides an opportunity for inquiry and experiential learning. Various topics and concepts can be addressed through these approaches, integrating relevant sustainability competencies in meaningful and context-appropriate ways.

Breakout Session 10: Empowering the Next Generation of Changemakers: Educators' Toolkit for Action-Oriented ESD

Organizer

UNU-IAS

Objectives

This capacity-building workshop asked the question: “How can we bridge the persistent gap between knowledge and action to raise a new generation of changemakers?” The session offered an opportunity for participants to explore practical ways of making learning more action-oriented and transformative. The session was co-moderated by **Nafissa Insebayeva**, Consultant, UNU-IAS and **Avelino Jr. Mejia**, Communication Associate, UNU-IAS.

The moderators introduced the “Action-Oriented Pedagogies for ESD (AOP for ESD)” toolkit developed by UNU-IAS, drawing on the expertise and best practices from the Global RCE Network. The toolkit was designed to strengthen

the action-oriented approaches to teaching, fostering transformative learning, nurturing learner agencies and inspiring real-world change. The session offered a space for dialogue, collaboration and the exchange of experiences. During the workshop, participants engaged in lesson plan design activity and discussion based on the AOP for ESD framework, which consists of seven components: 1) problem-based and real-world issues; 2) community engagement; 3) learner participation; 4) collaboration; 5) empathy; 6) interdisciplinarity and 7) regional and cultural relevance.

Participants rotated through stations dedicated to the AOP components they were seeking to improve in their own local environments. All seven components have received attention from the participants, highlighting the relevance of the framework.

Insights from the Session and Takeaways

During discussion, participants brought up some important insights, such as the fact that confidence and self-esteem are pre-requisites for action and are important learning outcomes. It was also highlighted that peers play an important role in inspiring sustainable behaviours and changing mindsets. At the same time, intergenerational collaboration is another key component to meaningful societal transformation, and it starts at home. Families also serve as an important source of expertise that could be tapped to enhance educational experiences for the next generations. Finally, it was stressed that we need to be careful about when, why and how we utilize emerging technologies in our classrooms as they may hinder necessary progress.

Plenary Session 5: Adoption of the Okayama Declaration

Plenary Session 5 focused on the adoption of *The 2025 Okayama Declaration*. The session was moderated by **Jonghwi Park**, Head of the Innovation and Education Programme at UNU-IAS. **Anupam Khajuria** presented the process of developing the Declaration, expressing gratitude to participants for their valuable feedback and introducing the Writing Committee, whose dedication was instrumental in shaping the final draft.

She outlined key milestones in the development process, including the inception meeting held in May 2025 and three rounds of consultations. The second round gathered input from 36 RCEs across different regions, while the third round, conducted during the conference, resulted in 27 sets of feedback on the draft shared on 21 October.

Khajuria noted that the Writing Committee convened two hours before the session to incorporate the latest comments and finalize the draft. The final version comprised a preamble, guiding vision and values and five key areas focusing on systemic transformation, digital and lifelong learning, and the scaling and strengthening of the RCE network, followed by a concluding section. Park elaborated on each of these parts in detail.

Following her presentation, Park facilitated an open discussion, guiding participants through each section of the Declaration and inviting final comments and suggestions. She ensured that the diverse perspectives raised by RCE members and conference participants were captured and addressed, providing clarifications and coordinating inputs from the floor.

The session concluded with the presentation of the live document, reflecting the collective efforts of the Global RCE Network. Khajuria made real-time updates based on feedback received, including remarks from H.R.H. Princess Abze Djigma and several RCE members. [The 2025 Okayama Declaration: RCEs' Collective Commitment for Sustainable Futures](#) was formally adopted on 22 October 2025 at the 14th Global RCE Conference in Okayama, Japan.

Closing Session

The Closing Session featured remarks by **Hirofumi Abe**, Chairperson of the Okayama ESD Promotion Commission, who expressed deep gratitude to all participants for their contributions and celebrated the successful adoption of the 2025 Okayama Declaration. He highlighted its significance in guiding the next 20 years of ESD and encouraged continued collaboration toward sustainable societies. **Yui Yoshino** and **James Kazuma**, student MCs for day 1 and day 2 respectively, also reflected on their experiences, expressing appreciation for the opportunity to engage with global leaders and emphasizing the vital role of youth in addressing future challenges. The session concluded with heartfelt thanks to all participants for their dedication and active engagement throughout the conference.

Day 3: 23 October 2025

All participants were divided into five groups, with four groups visiting municipal elementary schools and *kominkans* (Community Learning Centers), and one group visiting Okayama University.

Field Visit 1: Kominkan and Schools

At the elementary schools, participants observed classes conducted during the period for integrated studies, a component of the Japanese curriculum in which each school independently determines themes and learning activities grounded in local characteristics.

The first and second groups visited **Urayasu Elementary School**, where the integrated studies theme focuses on **regional disaster prevention**, reflecting the area's low-lying geography and vulnerability to flooding. On this day, students were divided into six groups to participate in hands-on activities designed to gather and analyze information for identifying and addressing local issues. Local disaster prevention specialists and other experts were invited as instructors. Participants observed students practicing how to respond when encountering an injured person, as well as learning how to remain safe in evacuation settings.

The third and fourth groups visited **Kyokuso Elementary School**, which has been working extensively on environmental issues. Students identified local environmental challenges, examined what actions they could take, and developed concrete plans for implementation. Each group presented activities such as investigating the causes of water pollution, understanding the importance of waste segregation, and exploring air pollution caused by vehicle emissions. Participants interacted directly with the students through Q&A sessions and experiential activities, allowing them to observe how ESD is embedded in the school's learning environment.

After the elementary school visits, each group travelled to one of four *kominkans*, where community-based activities tailored to local needs were introduced. At each site, local residents actively involved in the initiatives provided reports on their work and shared their perspectives on community development.

The first group visited **Fukuhama Kominkan**, located in a community with a mix of younger families and elderly residents, alongside a growing population of foreign workers. Key initiatives include a children's cafeteria, exercise classes to prevent social isolation among older adults, and Japanese language lessons. On this day, volunteer instructors from the language classes participated in an interview-style discussion, sharing insights into their activities.

The second group visited **Koki Kominkan**, situated in an area with many welfare-recipient households and a significant number of foreign residents. Major initiatives include "Environment Studies for Everyday Life" and "Simple Japanese Language and Cross-cultural Exchange." Local residents spoke about the importance of these activities and their impact on daily life.

The third group visited **Tomiyama Kominkan**, located in a quiet residential neighbourhood. Notable initiatives include programs to create safe spaces for children, parenting support activities and a nature conservation club. Residents provided presentations detailing the objectives and outcomes of each activity.

The fourth group visited **Saidaiji Kominkan**, situated in a historic port town that prospered through water transport and developed as the *monzenmachi* (temple town) of Saidaiji Temple. Featured initiatives included intergenerational workshops where people of all ages learn together as both teachers and students, as well as various upcycling projects. Residents introduced the content and community relevance of each activity.

At all four *kominkans*, active Q&A sessions were held, fostering vibrant discussions and exchanges of views between participants and community members. The visits provided meaningful insights into how community

centers serve as vital spaces for learning, social connection and community growth, and highlighted the important role of local residents in sustaining these initiatives.

Field Visit 2 : Okayama University

The field visit to Okayama University aimed to provide participants with an in-depth understanding of how higher education institutions can embody ESD through a whole-institution and whole-region approach. As one of the world's earliest RCEs and host of Asia's first UNESCO Chair in ESD, Okayama University sought to showcase its integrated model of linking research, education and community engagement to promote sustainability transformation. The programme also aligned with the 14th Global RCE Conference's theme, "Rethinking Learning for a Sustainable Future," offering participants opportunities to explore practical ESD applications within and beyond academia.

The programme began with welcome remarks by President **Yasutomo Nasu** and Vice President **Atsufumi Yokoi**, who also serves as the UNESCO Chairholder in Research and Education for Sustainable Development. Vice President Yokoi introduced the history of ESD and SDG initiatives at Okayama University, tracing their evolution from the establishment of RCE Okayama to the university's global leadership in advancing ESD. Speaking both from the institutional standpoint and from the UNESCO Chair's perspective, he reflected on the ethical transformation of higher education and the role of universities in fostering the well-being of humanity and the planet.

Two parallel breakout sessions followed:

- At the **Faculty of Education**, the session titled "ESD Research and Education" organized by the **Okayama University ESD Promotion Centre** presented research and pedagogy integrating sustainability into teacher education and community partnerships.
- At the **University Library**, the youth session "From Dream to Action — From Self-Actualization to Self-Transcendence" featured high school and university students engaging in intergenerational dialogue moderated by Vice President Yokoi, focusing on transforming personal aspirations into social and planetary contributions.

In the latter half, participants reconvened at the venue 'KIBINOVE' for two presentations linking education, creativity and sustainability:

- The **Fukutake Foundation** presented "Learning that Leads to Well-being at Benesse Art Site Naoshima," illustrating how art and place-based learning foster empathy and intergenerational connection.
- **Nagase Viita** presented "Our Journey from Okayama for a Sustainable Future," highlighting its School of Food initiative that bridges research and development (R&D), education and local industries to advance food literacy and circular value creation.

The field visit provided participants with an opportunity to observe and reflect on how universities can function as ethical ecosystems and action tanks, linking research, art and industry to drive social innovation and intergenerational learning through a whole institution approach. It highlighted the effectiveness of Okayama University's approach in demonstrating ESD as a lived, evolving practice rather than an abstract policy framework.

Participants also gained valuable perspectives on how creative partnerships among academia, private sector, and local communities through a whole region approach can contribute to human and planetary well-being. The Okayama model of ESD offered practical insights into how higher education can nurture collaboration, creativity and care — serving as a transformative force for sustainability at both local, global and planetary scales.

Optional Tour - Field Visits and Cultural Programme

Following the field visits, participants joined one of two cultural tour courses designed to showcase the rich history, traditional arts and regional heritage of Okayama.

The first course brought participants to **Sōgenji Temple** and **Okayama Kōraku-en Garden**. At Sōgenji Temple, participants were guided through a Zazen meditation session and experienced sutra copying, gaining insight into traditional Zen Buddhist practices. The tour then continued to Okayama Kōraku-en, celebrated as one of Japan's Three Great Gardens, where participants enjoyed a tranquil walk through its expansive landscapes. The experience concluded with a hands-on activity at a facility adjacent to Okayama Castle, where participants painted *maneki-neko* (beckoning cat figurines), symbols of good fortune, and brought their completed creations home as souvenirs.

The second course highlighted **Bizen-yaki**, one of Japan's oldest and most esteemed forms of pottery. Participants traveled to Bizen City, where they attended a lecture by a distinguished Bizen-yaki artist and observed a live clay-molding demonstration. They also visited a traditional kiln and took part in assembling their own Bizen-yaki wind bells, which they were invited to keep as mementos of the visit.

At the conclusion of the tours, both groups reconvened for a **night banquet hosted at Okayama Castle**. Held inside the castle's iconic main tower — an emblematic landmark of Okayama City — the banquet featured dishes prepared with locally sourced ingredients, offering participants an opportunity to savour the region's culinary heritage. The evening programme also included dynamic samurai and ninja performances, providing a memorable cultural experience and warm expression of Japanese hospitality.

Post-event Survey Results

This section presents the key findings from the post-event survey, offering an overview of participants' feedback on various aspects of the conference, including overall satisfaction, thematic relevance, session quality, and motivation for future action.

The Global RCE Conference brought together 147 in-person participants from 31 countries, and 119 joined online, resulting in 266 participants overall. With the 16 countries represented exclusively by online participants, the conference reached participants from 47 countries in total.

1. Gender of Respondents

97 participants responded to the post-event survey of whom 47 identified as male and 48 as female, reflecting a good gender balance (Figure 1).

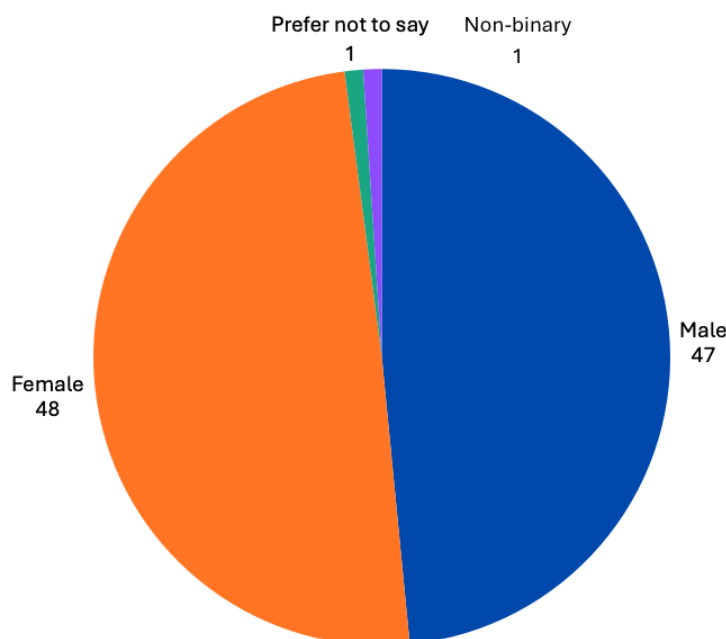


Figure 1. Gender (n=97)

2. Overall Satisfaction

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statement, “I was satisfied with the overall conference experience.” Satisfaction levels were notably high: **97% (n=88)** of respondents reported being satisfied with the overall conference experience, demonstrating a highly positive reception of the event (Figure 2). Respondents also perceived the conference as impactful and inspirational beyond its technical content, reinforcing the value of collaboration, knowledge exchange and future collective action.

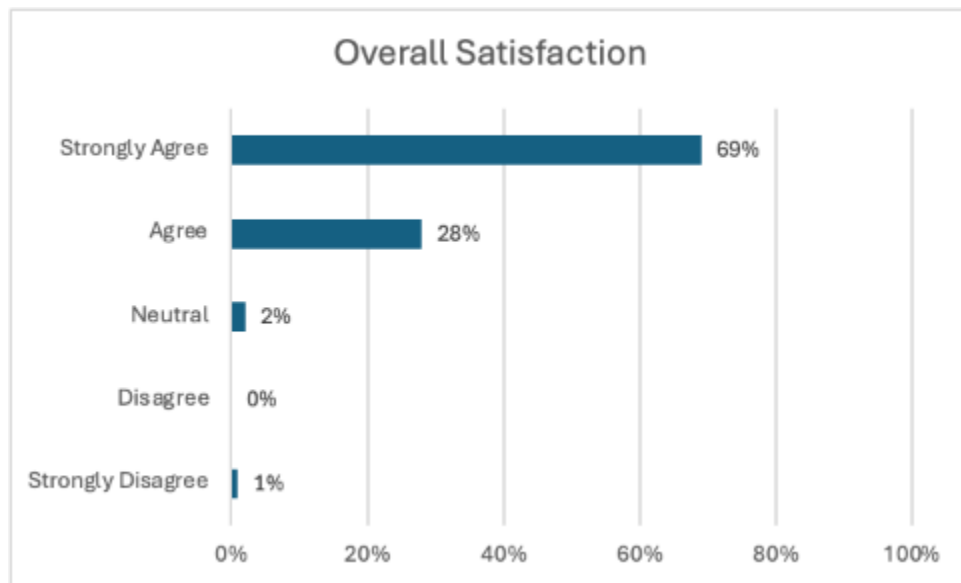


Figure 2. Overall Satisfaction (n=88)

3. Relevance of the Conference Theme

The question, “The conference theme — ‘Rethinking Learning for a Sustainable Future: 20 Years of RCE Action and Innovation’ — was relevant to the current work and needs of my RCE,” received overwhelmingly positive responses. **99% (n=88)** of participants agreed that the theme aligned with their local priorities and needs (Figure 3). Respondents noted that the conference addressed key issues while offering opportunities to gain practical skills, confidence and strategies for collaboration applicable to community work and stakeholder engagement.

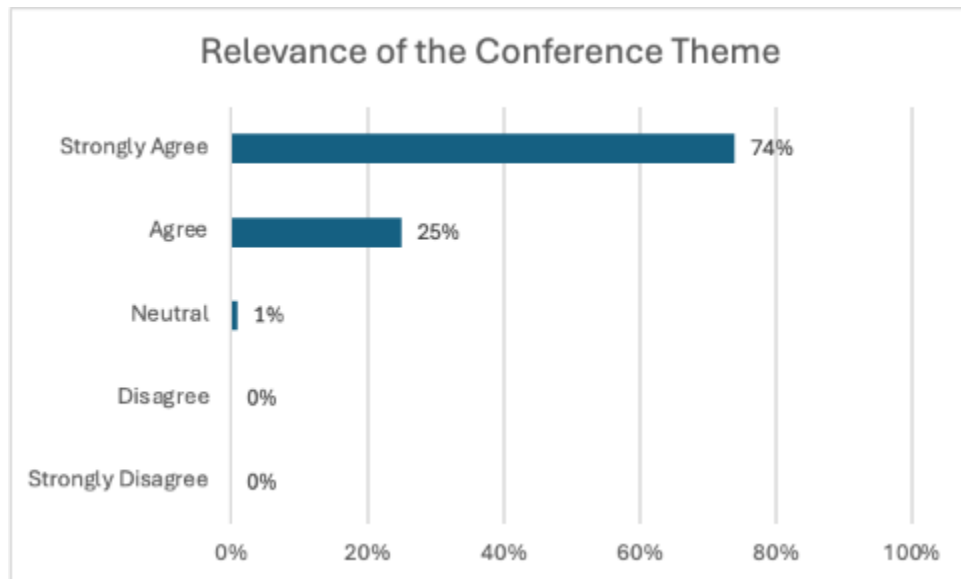


Figure 3. Relevance of the Conference Theme (n=88)

4. Diversity of Sessions

On the question, “The sessions reflected a diverse range of themes, speakers, and regional perspectives,” **97% (n=88)** of respondents agreed that the sessions were diverse (Figure 4). Feedback highlighted that each session was uniquely designed and enriched by a wide range of professional backgrounds and geographic representation.

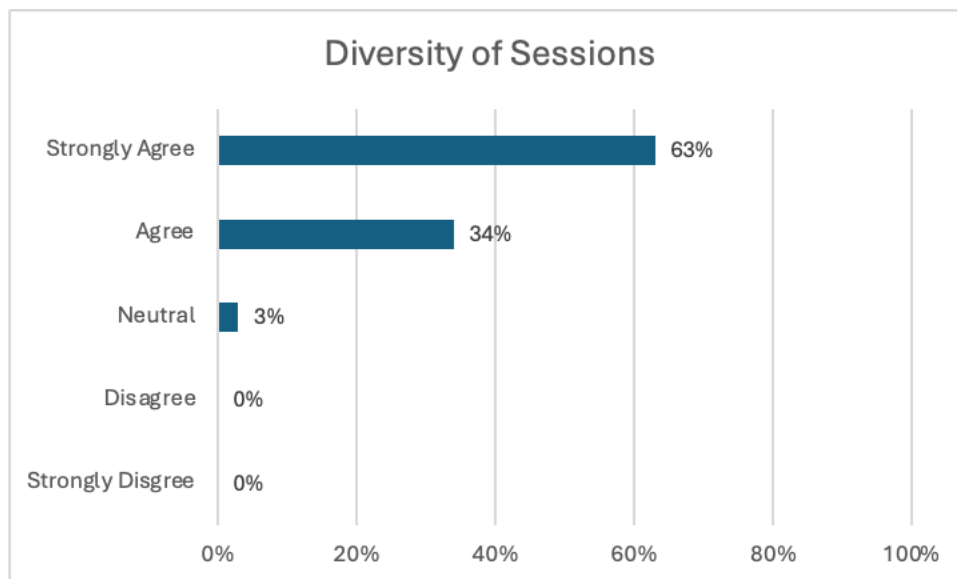


Figure 4. Diversity of Sessions (n=88)

5. Quality of Sessions

Regarding the quality of sessions, in response to the statement, “The sessions were of high quality in terms of content and delivery,” **93% (n=88)** of respondents agreed (Figure 5). Feedback indicated that presenters shared valuable knowledge and practical experiences, and that hearing clear impact stories and institutional perspectives added meaningful depth to the discussions.

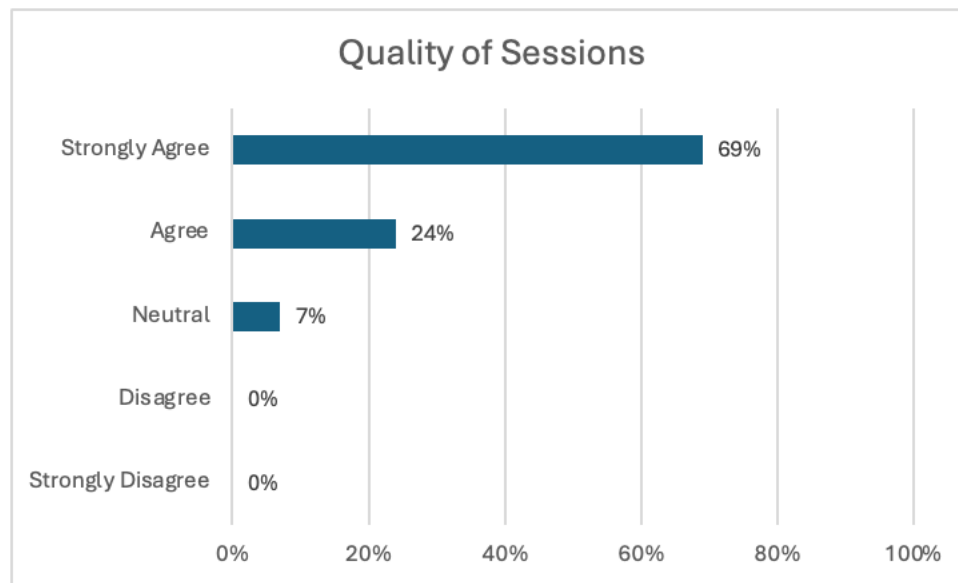


Figure 5. Quality of Sessions (n=88)

6. Enhanced Capacity to Address Emerging Challenges

The survey also assessed whether the conference contributed to strengthening participants' capacity to address emerging sustainability challenges, which was one of the conference objectives. For the statement, "The conference enhanced my capacity to address emerging sustainability challenges such as climate change, social inequality, and resource management," **97% (n=79)** of respondents agreed (Figure 6). Feedback indicated that learning about progress across different RCE regions enabled participants to gain new skills, explore innovative practices and consider how these approaches could be applied within their own local contexts.

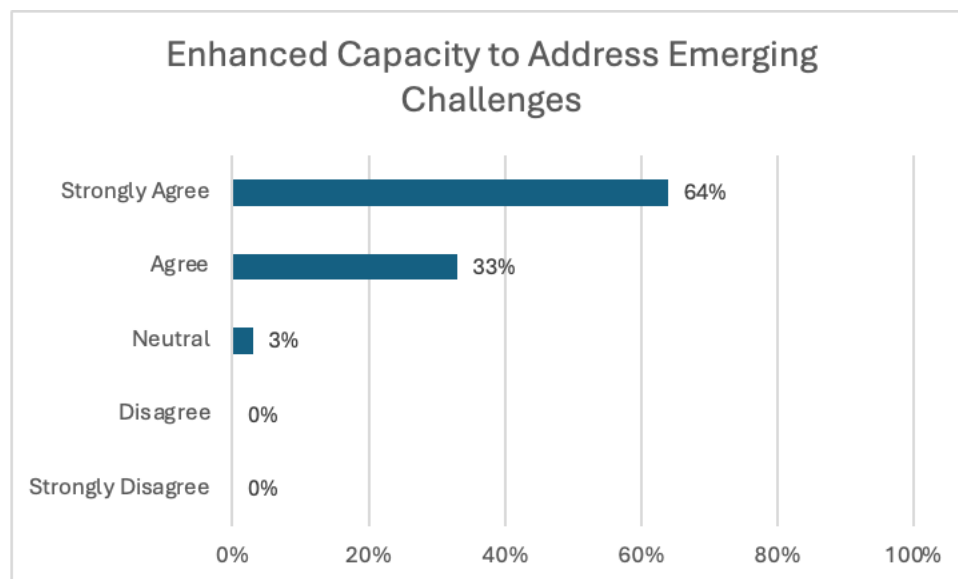


Figure 6. Enhanced Capacity to Address Emerging Challenges (n=79)

7. Motivation for Future Action

For the question on motivation for future action, “The conference inspired me to take further action on ESD and sustainability in my community and region,” **95% (n=79)** of respondents indicated that the conference motivated them to pursue further action (Figure 7). Feedback highlighted that discussions on lessons learned and future pathways encouraged participants to develop concrete action plans and reflect on steps moving forward.

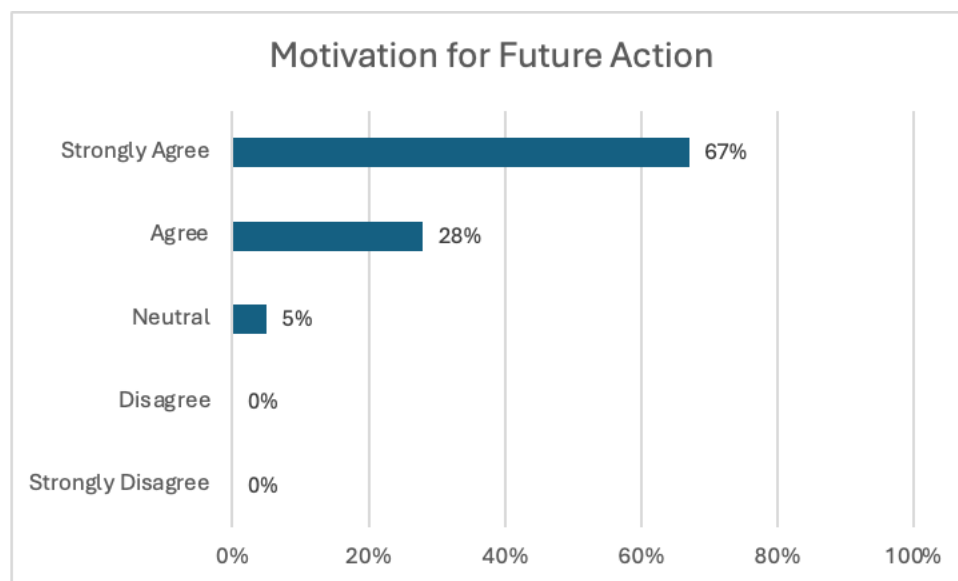


Figure 7. Motivation for Future Action (n=79)

Overall, the post-event survey results demonstrate a highly positive reception of the conference across all measured dimensions. Respondents expressed strong satisfaction with the overall conference experience and affirmed the relevance of the theme to their RCE activities. The sessions were viewed as diverse, high in quality and enriched by a wide range of expertise and regional perspectives. Importantly, the conference contributed to strengthening participants’ capacity to address emerging sustainability challenges and inspired participants to pursue further ESD-related action within their communities and regions. Collectively, these findings highlight the conference’s effectiveness in fostering collaboration, enhancing knowledge exchange and motivating future collective efforts within the Global RCE Network and beyond.