

■ Feature

Okayama University: Getting ready for the SDGs

Okayama's growing reputation for education for sustainable development

Okayama City (Okayama) is the location for the 'Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)' (called 'RCE Okayama') —a multi-stakeholder platform including Okayama University, which collaborates to empower people to change the way they think and work towards a sustainable future in



Photos: Dr. Hirofumi Makino, designed by Atsufumi Yokoi

Okayama. Acknowledged first in the world as one of the 'Initial Seven' RCEs on ESD by United Nations University (UNU) in 2005 among 156 RCEs around the world and the UNESCO Chair on ESD in 2007, RCE Okayama and Okayama University have been forming a vanguard of early movers in this field of ESD for more than a decade. Recently, the RCE Okayama and Okayama City received prestigious global awards and recognition from UNESCO, including the UNESCO-Japan Prize on ESD 2016 and the UNESCO Learning City Award 2017. Okayama, with this history and reputation, is recognized as one of the leading cities in the world for ESD to nurture people who will undertake the responsibility of building a sustainable society and contribute to an emerging global agenda with strong buy-in and adoption among world leaders for 'The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)' towards a better, sustainable future for all.

'Makino Vision' towards achieving the SDGs

With these tangible awards and achievements, Okayama University launched the President's Vision in April 2017, 'Makino Vision: Heading Further, To a Fruitful Academic Capital' for sustainable development. As a new breed of university for the SDGs as well as ESD, which makes Okayama one of the best places in the world for integrating sustainability thinking and practice, Okayama University will be developing a strategic framework and a systemic approach to complex problems of sustainable development on a global scale and will also be promoting educational and research initiatives into the SDGs in an ongoing and scalable way. However, how can we champion the SDGs? More precisely, do the SDGs have a positive effect on our research and education, and vice versa? Does this global agenda work at a local level? Together we need to find out what the SDGs means in our minds and on a local and global scale through dialogue and discussion in a triple-helix manner between governments, industries, and academia.

First step in understanding the SDGs

To rethink and align our university's role and function to the SDGs based on the Makino Vision, Okayama University is making an effort to familiarize itself with the SDGs through dialogue and consultation with internal and external stakeholders. First, Okayama University organized a symposium and workshop entitled, 'How Universities as Members of Society Should be Thinking: Through the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)', from 31st August to 1st September 2017, in association with the Young Academy of Japan, Science Council Japan. Throughout the two-day event, participants discussed how science and academic knowledge can contribute to SDGs and how the advancement of SDGs should be pursued based on diverse local contexts including that of Okayama. In short, as an outcome the workshop adopted a recommendation that included the following four central issues:

- Acknowledgement of the roles of science and local culture in the advancement of SDGs
- The need to increase the spaces for dialogue among experts with diverse backgrounds
- The necessity for academic society to appreciate and value the contribution of academics to research and other actions to contribute to the SDGs
- The restructuring of educational programs based on the SDGs

Over 190 people from universities, high schools, prefectural and city offices, businesses, and civil society organizations attended the symposium. Meanwhile, more than 50 researchers, university and high school teachers and students, officers from prefectural and city authorities, and members of the Young Academy of Japan, Science Council Japan participated in the workshop, making this a truly successful event.

Following the conference and workshop, RCE Okayama, Okayama University and the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (UNU-IAS) will be co-hosting 'First RCE Thematic Conference: Towards Achieving the SDGs' to be held in Okayama, Japan from 5-7 December 2017 in order to exchange ideas for SDGs with greater impact and reach. The conference will discuss and launch strategies and activities in the fields of biodiversity, climate change and sustainable consumption, and production to identify and make substantial contributions and tangible commitments by RCE on the SDGs and the Global Action Programme (GAP) on ESD.

During the conference, RCEs are encouraged to submit summaries of their best practices and challenges in these areas, to be shared with a rich mixture of participants from international organizations, governments, academia, industry, NGOs, and NPOs from across the world. At the Okayama Session on the SDGs, in particular, we hope to encourage higher education institutions to make a much broader contribution to the SDGs through excellence research and education with multi-stakeholder partnerships, and other voluntary initiatives. The conference will also offer capacity building workshops, poster sessions,



Symposium
(Okayama University 50th Anniversary Hall)



Participants discussing in the workshop

and field trips for RCEs to learn what UN organizations and other international partners are doing in these areas, and to discuss how RCEs can accelerate their actions by engaging and working with local communities.

Okayama University helps the SDGs/ The SDGs helps Okayama University

With the understanding of the SDGs in a university-wide level and our solid foundation and reputation of ESD, Okayama University actively seeks the opportunities of the SDGs beyond academic disciplines and institutional boundaries: connecting research and education to society, and engaging stakeholders beyond the university. In other words, the SDGs will be a major influencer and driver for mobilizing our knowledge and solutions for sustainable development while transforming our organizational behavior and culture, which makes us more distinct and attractive than ever before for a higher education destination for sustainable development. We enthusiastically invite like-minded people and organizations to join us on this journey towards achieving the SDGs.

Reference:

Authors

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Further information

1. First RCE Thematic Conference: Towards Achieving the SDGs
http://www.okayama-u.ac.jp/eng/events/index_id2041.html



2. Reconsidering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Okayama:Symposium and Workshop Held
http://www.okayama-u.ac.jp/eng/news/index_id6964.html



3. Okayama University
http://www.okayama-u.ac.jp/index_e.html



“Okayama University supports the Sustainable Development Goals”