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Global Environmental Outreach Centre (GEOC): 20 Years of Partnerships

Background and Objectives

GEOC was established at the United Nations University headquarters in Tokyo in 1996 as a joint initiative of the United Nations University (UNU) and the Ministry of the Environment of Japan (MOEJ). It was founded based on the Tokyo Declaration adopted at the Tokyo Conference on Global Environmental Action, the conference held to implement Agenda 21 in 1994.

Agenda 21 was adopted with the Rio Declaration on the Environment and Development in 1992 at the UN Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED), a conference called for action to implement environmentally sound development. The Declaration called for the implementation of a set of principles on the environment, and Agenda 21 states the action plan. These documents were created to address the need for a new and equitable global partnership and communication among international organizations, local and national governments, and NGOs.

To respond to such needs, GEOC has been serving as an intermediary organization to support the establishment and maintenance of partnerships among the different sectors. The focus is on supporting the involvement of the major groups identified in Agenda 21 (Women, Children and Youth, Indigenous Peoples, NGOs, Local Authorities, Workers and Trade Unions, Business and Industry,

Scientific and Technological Community, Farmers) in the implementation of sustainable development and in Chapter 27 of Agenda 21, "Strengthening of the role of non-governmental organizations: Partners for sustainable development." GEOC's activities include operation of a center for collaboration among citizens, the private sector, local authorities, national governments and international organizations, hosting awareness-raising symposiums and seminars, supporting opportunities for multi-sector collaboration, supporting citizen-driven activities by helping information dissemination and providing spaces for gathering.

Achievements

GEOC's efforts over the last two decades have contributed to awareness raising and enhanced understanding through partnerships. Through the years, multi-stakeholder partnership initiatives have grown locally and globally. In terms of nationwide initiatives, MOEJ has led the establishment of eight Regional Environmental Partnership Offices (EPO) to serve as the regional focal points to facilitate various activities, including environmental education and conservation activities. As for global initiatives, UNU-IAS has led the establishment of Regional Centres of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development (RCEs), and 154 RCEs have been set up around the

world to serve as bases for advancing community partnerships and collaboration to deliver education for sustainable development (ESD).

Ways Forward

Despite these achievements, global issues such as climate change, loss of biodiversity and marine pollution are becoming more complex, and there is a growing need to advance partnerships to solve these issues. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 at the United Nations also address the importance of partnerships in Goal 17 as a means of achieving all 17 goals. To commit to this new global agenda, GEOC will continue its effort to support the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships to transform local communities and civil society by taking a comprehensive approach covering environmental, economic and social aspects of sustainability.



17 Goals of the SDGs

Report on Global Environmental Outreach Center 20th Anniversary Symposium GEOC and Future Partnerships



On 12 October 2016, GEOC organized a symposium to celebrate its 20th Anniversary. The symposium invited experts and practitioners across sectors and discussed achievements in the two decades and the future role to achieve SDGs goal 17: Revitalize global partnerships for sustainable development.



The symposium opened with remarks from Yoshimi Okunushi, (Director General, Environmental Policy Bureau, MOEJ) and Kazuhiko Takemoto (Director of the UNU Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability (IAS)). Mr. Okunushi and Dr. Takemoto expressed appreciation for the support extended to GEOC's activities over the past 20 years and highlighted future hope for GEOC's important role in facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships to resolve global challenges.

In the keynote speeches, Hikaru Kobayashi (Project Professor, Graduate School of Media and Governance, Keio University) and Norichika Kanie (Senior Research Fellow, UNU-IAS) presented on the development of partnership initiatives in Japan and ways to achieve the SDGs.

A panel discussion was represented by Masahisa Sato (Professor, Faculty of Environmental and Information Studies, Tokyo City University), Osamu Abe (Director, ESD Research Center, Rikkyo University), Katsuji Imata (Co-director, CSO Network Japan), Emiko Nagasawa (Coordinator of 1% Club, group head of training, Japan Business Federation Project Service), and Mikiko Nagai (Office Manager, UNU-IAS OUIK) discussed ways to utilize partnerships and the challenges.

Synergy of Partnerships

Dr. Kobayashi explained Japan's experience in progressing partnerships. He stressed that the incorporation of public and private partnerships into the policy arrangements is one of the achievements of the partnerships in Japan. He also highlighted that a

partnership is significant because it brings added value and synergy, which facilitates the achievement of challenging goals. He expressed his hope for GEOC to facilitate collaboration between the private sector and local authorities and commit to creating a mechanism for concrete action.

Interlinked and Cross-cutting Nature of the SDGs

Dr. Kanie highlighted the role of partnerships in achieving the SDGs. He stressed the importance of solving problems through partnerships as the SDGs address cross-cutting issues such as poverty and the environment, and the environment and gender. He also addressed the potential of multi-stakeholder partnerships to generate creative solutions to pressing global issues. Finally, he expressed his hope for GEOC to facilitate mechanisms that contribute to creative solutions to global issues.

Roles Expected for GEOC

In the following session, Dr. Sato presented a summary of 12 consecutive GEOC relay sessions.

Based on discussions from these sessions, he identified five expected roles of GEOC: 1) Role to facilitate transformation, 2) Role to support partnership processes, 3) Role to connect resources, 4) Role in supporting problem solving, and 5) Role as national hub center. He added that it is important for GEOC to perform various functions and make a positive impact on society.

Challenges and Needs

In the panel discussions, panelists discussed current challenges and the future of the partnerships. In the discussions, shortcomings including lack of information in English and international coordination were addressed. In addition, unequal and superficial partnerships, the obscure responsibility of an agent in multi-stakeholder partnerships were identified as challenges and vulnerabilities of partnerships.

To address these challenges, panelists shared the view that future partnerships need clear responsibilities, monitoring mechanisms, stronger coordination among intermediate organizations, partnerships among different sectors, creation of youth-centered mechanisms, and a platform to share problems.

In addition, they also highlighted the importance of the basic principles of partnerships including promoting trust and "reach the furthest behind first" spirit.

The symposium closed with remarks by Tsunao Watanabe (Senior Programme Coordinator, UNU-IAS), who stressed GEOC's continuing commitment to advance partnerships to contribute to the transformation of society by supporting the localization of the global agenda.