

Collaboration between Universities and Local Stakeholders for ESD in Okayama City: Achievements and Challenges

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Abstract

The Okayama region was acknowledged as a Regional Center of Expertise (RCE) in June 2005. In advance of that acknowledgement, experts and leaders in Okayama City reached an agreement to work together for the promotion of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). The Okayama ESD Project started in April 2005. Meanwhile, Okayama University submitted a proposal for a UNESCO Chair Programme on ESD to UNESCO and received accreditation in April 2007. Consequently, a cooperative relationship for the promotion of ESD was established among main stakeholders: administrative bodies, citizens' groups (NGOs), and higher educational institutions. This paper presents an overview of ESD activities in Okayama City, with particular emphasis on the development of partnerships among local stakeholders. It concludes by presenting discussion of the roles of higher education institutions in ESD and the challenges confronting ESD activities in Okayama City.

1. Introduction

It has been pointed out that, despite the great many proposals of Agenda 21 made at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the subsequent decade saw no significant improvement of the environment. Under such circumstances, the Japanese government made a proposal called the United Nations Decade for Sustainable Development (UNDESD) at the 2002 Johannesburg Summit: that Decade began in 2005.

In Okayama City, it is reported that more than ten percent of the population is involved in activities for making their society sustainable; of them, about 30,000 people are engaged in the sector of environmental protection, about 34,000 in the sector of promotion of gender equality, and about 7000 in the health promotion sector. Participants in these sectors collaborate tirelessly to achieve their mutual goal of social improvement.

In April 2005, an agreement was reached among experts and leaders, including researchers of universities in Okayama City to work together for creation of a local base for the promotion of ESD. The Okayama ESD Promotion Commission was established.

The United Nations University recognized Okayama as a Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) in June 2005. In Okayama, various initiatives, especially in the spheres of "environment" and "international understanding" have been carried out. The central stakeholders are local NGOs. The NGOs and the relevant organizations in Okayama have held international conferences annually over 13 times in the past, with the intention of resolving issues related to a sustainable society. At the last three conferences, ESD was raised as the main theme.

Okayama University submitted a proposal for a UNESCO Chair Programme on ESD to UNESCO and received accreditation in April 2007. The proposed Chair has been collaborating with RCE Okayama, local governments, NGOs, University Consortium Okayama, and other stakeholders to promote ESD activities in Japan and the Asia-Pacific region.

This paper presents an overview of ESD activities in Okayama City, with emphasis on the development of partnerships among local stakeholders. It concludes by presenting a discussion of the roles of higher education institutions in ESD and the challenges facing ESD activities in Okayama City.

2. Okayama City and ESD

2.1 Geographical Features and Environmental issues

Okayama City is the capital of Okayama Prefecture. It has a population of about 700,000 and an area of 790 square kilometers. It is a major commercial, educational and cultural center of the Chugoku-Shikoku region in Japan. The city is rich in nature, such as farmlands and mountains, but it is less likely to be affected by natural disasters than other cities in similar environments. The city also preserves historical assets such as Korakuen Garden (said to be one of the three finest gardens in Japan), Okayama Castle, Kibitsu Shrine, and so on.

Okayama City has developed steadily as the center of Okayama Prefecture since Japan's feudal era ended in 1868. It has acquired business, educational, cultural, political, and administrative functions and has all the facilities necessary for a comfortable lifestyle.

On the other hand, the city is facing various problems, as are other cities in Japan. One problem is that Okayama City is predicted to become home to an aged society because of a declining birth rate and longer average life span, with one out of five people being a senior citizen in 2010. The region's economic power might decrease and the burden of social insurance will become heavier if this prediction is realized. In addition, many urban problems, such as abandonment of midtown areas because of suburban sprawl, the destruction of fields, farmlands, and natural environments in the suburbs, and severe traffic congestion caused by over-dependence on private transportation, are becoming more apparent and are sounding an alarm for the sustainable development of the city.

2.2. ESD Activities in Okayama City

In Okayama, surrounded as it is by nature, many citizens' groups have been voluntarily participating in environmental activities. These activities include installing natural energy equipment at public facilities financed by public donations, protecting endangered freshwater fish in urban areas, and fostering children's environmental conservation activities in cooperation with various people living in the region.

Okayama City, as an administrative body, launched the "Environmental Partnership Project" in April 2001 to support environmental activities, as well as to increase both the awareness of, and voluntary participation in, environmental conservation efforts that are undertaken throughout the region. By the end of the fiscal year 2006, 841 groups, comprising about 32,076 people, have taken part, underscoring the success of the project. In addition, community center ("Kominkan" in Japanese) activities have flourished in the Okayama region. Many people are participating in lifelong study at these centers. In addition, more than 100 groups are currently engaged in international exchanges and cooperation, as typified by the Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA), an NGO providing humanitarian medical assistance throughout the world.

As described above, various organizations and institutions have carried out educational programs

related to the environment and intercultural understanding. However, because the content and frequency of such programs has varied considerably, it is difficult to judge whether these programs have been implemented effectively in the region as a whole. Consequently, consultations among organizations connected with ESD, in response to the launch of DESD, have led to the creation of the “Okayama ESD Project.” This project is intended to promote ESD activities that reflect the nature of the Okayama region.

2.3 Outline of RCE Okayama

The Okayama region was acknowledged as a Regional Center of Expertise (RCE) by United Nations University at the UNU/UNESCO International Conference “Sustaining the Future – Globalization and Education for Sustainable Development–” held in Nagoya City, Japan during 28–29 June 2005.

The authorization of RCE Okayama has the following points of importance:

- 1) It will be easier for groups or individuals engaging in ESD-related activities in the region to create a flexible network for their common interests and purposes.
- 2) Groups or individuals can access broader and more complex views and can engage in their activities across a wider area, and in a more meaningful way, through exchange of information and interaction with others both within and outside the region.
- 3) Through cooperation with higher educational institutions such as universities, a higher level of knowledge and/or technique can be used.
- 4) By exchanging information with RCEs around the world through the United Nations University, various groups, including administrative bodies, citizens’ groups, educational institutions and business organizations, will be encouraged to cooperate for higher quality ESD activities.

The goal of the Okayama ESD Project is to promote ESD which reflects the nature of the region and to create a community in which people study, think, and act together through interaction and cooperation among people involved in ESD within and outside the region.

The Short-term Objectives of the Okayama ESD Project (i.e. the objectives for the first term from April 2005 to March 2007) are as follows:

- 1) To raise understanding and awareness of SD and this project among organizations, groups, and individuals in the region, and to increase active participation by affiliated organizations.
- 2) To support organizations involved in ESD and strengthen partnerships with them.
- 3) To create ESD-related programs or curricula which reflect the nature of the region.
- 4) To advance each organization involved in ESD.
- 5) To foster primary organizations which serve as the backbone for regional ESD promotion.

The long-term objectives of the Okayama ESD Project are as follows:

- 1) To designate and foster specific organizations as Primary Organizations to promote ESD in the region. These organizations would play a central role in enhancing the capabilities of each affiliated organization to implement ESD in accordance with its characteristics and abilities.
- 2) To raise awareness and understanding of SD among all people living and working in the Okayama region.
- 3) To create a sustainable regional society through ESD.

Figure 1 presents the organizational structure of Okayama ESD Project. The Council of Okayama ESD Promotion Commission will formulate plans for promotion and implementation of activities, while the Steering Board will designate and support Primary Organizations and Activities involved in ESD, facilitate collaboration, exchange and communication between organizations involved in the RCE, and

raise awareness and understanding of ESD throughout the region. The ESD Research Group will research and investigate methods that will promote ESD activities reflecting the nature of the region.

The Secretariat of the Commission is the Environmental Conservation Division, City of Okayama and its budget will come from money entrusted by Okayama City and other external subsidies. Activities are decided at the Council and the subsequent operation is managed by the Steering Board.

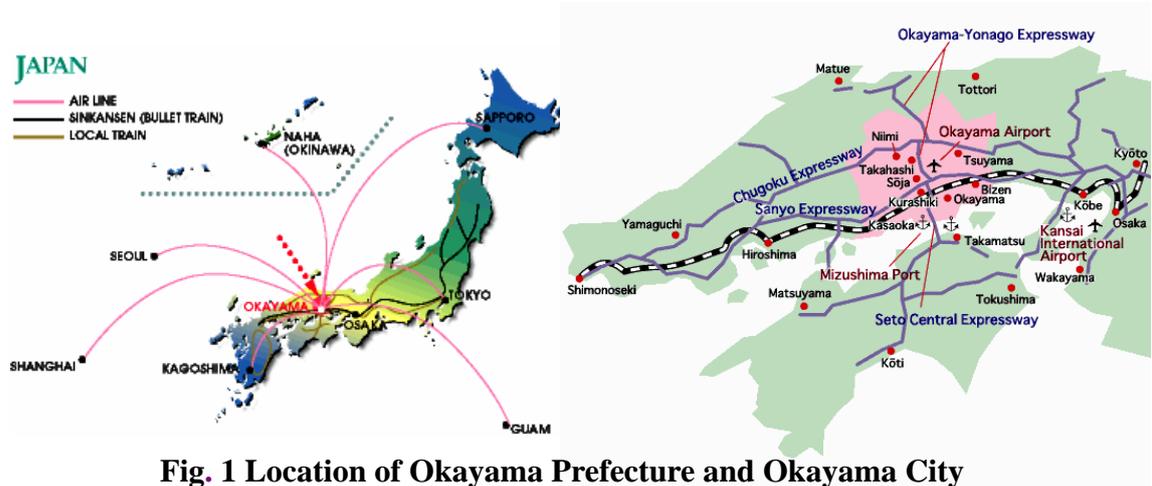


Fig. 1 Location of Okayama Prefecture and Okayama City

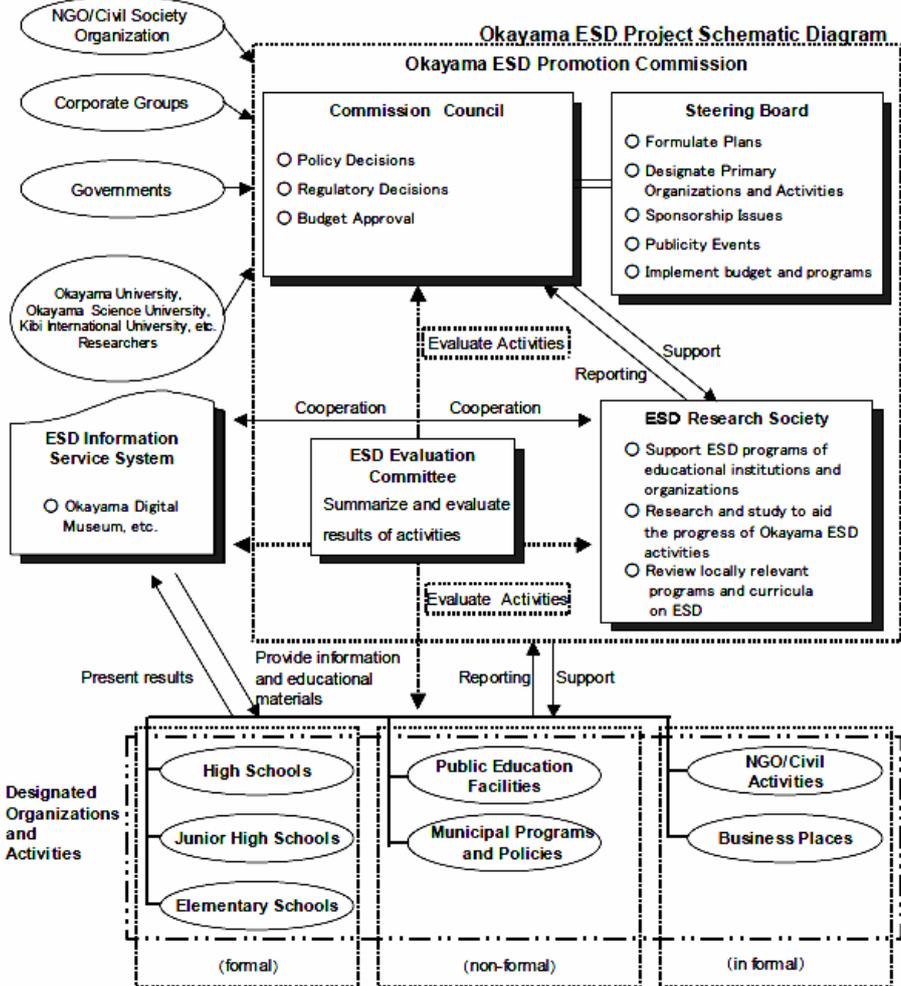


Fig. 2 Schematic Diagram of Okayama ESD Project

3. Local NGOs and ESD

The Okayama Topia for International Contribution (OTIC) was established in 1994 to promote international collaboration and contribution with the aim at serving in five major fields: medical care, education, religion, environment and social welfare.

The founding philosophy of OTIC is based upon and reflected by the spiritual climate of Okayama: medical care, education, and religion have long been respected and highly valued. The goal of OTIC is to enhance the capacity of Okayama as a city of world repute in the field of humanitarian activities. The underlying philosophy of the OTIC created and advocated by late Prof. Sumio Taniguchi (President of Okayama University, 1969–1975), Dr. Shigeru Suganami (the current president of Association of Medical Doctors of Asia (AMDA)), and many other concerned pioneer citizens in and out of Okayama.

Since its inception in 1994, OTIC has concentrated mainly on holding the Okayama NGO Summit for International Contribution every year, by inviting worldwide delegations as well as local representatives. The Summits have been co-organized by the Conference of Okayama International NGO Network (COINN), which was established in 1991 with the participation of some 60 organizations for international cooperation in Okayama Prefecture. The Graduate School of Environmental Science, Okayama University has jointly hosted the NGO Summits since 2006.

The past NGO Summits were held under the following themes:

- 1996 Religion
- 1997 Environment
- 1998 Social welfare
- 1999 Respect for Humanity
- 2000 Education for a Sustainable Future
- 2001 Children's Summit
- 2002 To live as a global citizen
- 2003 Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (DESD)
- 2004 Education for Sustainable Development
 - Development of Multi-media Packages and ICT Tools –
- 2005 Cooperation between Formal and Non-formal Education
- 2006 Cooperation between NGOs and Universities towards Realizing a Sustainable Society
- 2007 Kominkan Summit in Okayama
 - Community Development and Promoting Education for Sustainable Development –

4. Okayama University and ESD

4.1 Outline of Okayama University

Okayama University is a major university in Japan. The history of Okayama University goes back about 140 years. Its origin is in the Medical Training Center, which was founded in 1570 by the feudal lord of Okayama, and upgraded to the Okayama Medical College in 1922. Okayama University was founded as a national university in 1949 with five faculties: Faculty of Law and Letters, Faculty of Education, Faculty of Science, Faculty of Medicine and Faculty of Agriculture. Today, the university has 11 faculties and 8 graduate schools with 1,322 academic staff and 12,129 students.

4.2 The Graduate School of Environmental Science

In April 2005, Okayama University established a new graduate school, the “Graduate School of Environmental Science,” devoted to the future, complex, and interdisciplinary environmental science with the support of the existing Graduate School of Medicine, Dentistry and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Graduate School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and the Graduate School of Natural Science and Technology.

Because of the strong economic growth in countries of the Pacific Rim, e.g., China, Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, most people believe that the 21st century will become the Asian era. Simultaneously, rapidly developing environmental problems will occur and affect all Pacific regions. To tackle those problems adequately, the Graduate School of Environmental Science is aimed at establishing “Science for the Asian Environment” with close international cooperation, especially within the Pacific Rim.

- ① Sustainable development based on coexistence of human and nature
- ② Interdisciplinary solution of complex environmental problems
- ③ International education and research center of environmental science

■ Division of Social Engineering and Environmental Management

- Department of Urban Environment Development
- Department of Rural Environment Management

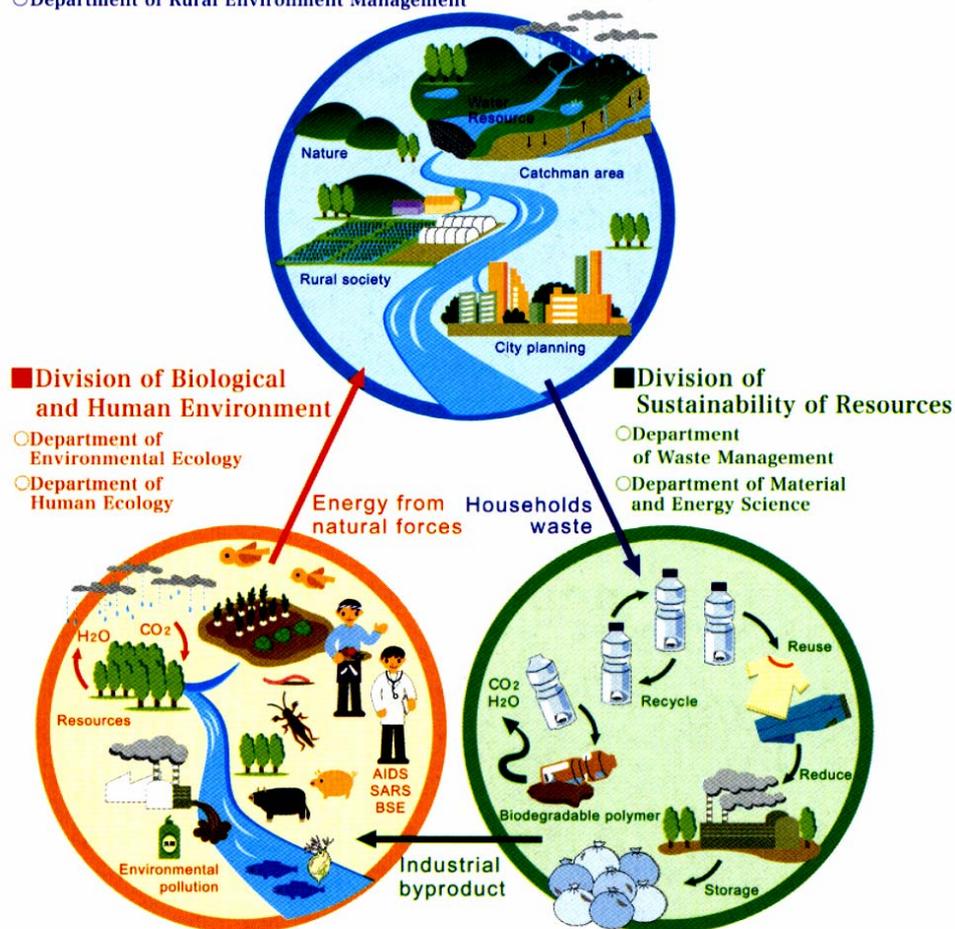


Fig. 3 Majors of the Graduate School of Environmental Science, Okayama University

4.3 The UNITWIN/UNESCO Chair Programme at Okayama University

In 2005, the program of “Environmental Ethics – Health and the Environment–” was adopted under “Initiatives for Attractive Education in Graduate Schools” of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to enhance the performance of the Graduate School. This program provided graduate students wishing to be experts on the environment with opportunities to undertake practical field studies in developing countries in cooperation with their professors and NGOs.

Based on the accomplishments of the program, Okayama University submitted a UNESCO Chair program on ESD, namely “UNITWIN/UNESCO Chair Programme in Research and Education for Sustainable Development at Okayama University” to UNESCO and received official accreditation in April 2007.

UNITWIN is the abbreviation for the UNIVERSITY TWINNING and networking scheme. The Programme was established in 1992 following the relevant decision of the General Conference of UNESCO taken at its 26th session. The UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme was conceived as a means to advance research, training, and program development in higher education by building university networks and encouraging inter-university cooperation through transfer of knowledge across borders. Today, 630 UNESCO Chairs and 67 UNITWIN Networks exist in programs involving over 760 institutions in 125 countries.

In Japan, the following UNITWIN/UNESCO Chair Programmes have been established:

- UNESCO Chair on Environmental Management and Infrastructure Development Engineering, established in 1997 at Saitama University
- UNESCO Chair on Naval Architecture and Ocean Engineering, established in 1997 at Hiroshima University
- A.P.D.E.M. Asia-Pacific Distance and Multimedia Education Network, established in 1999 at Waseda University
- UNESCO Chair in Communication, established in 1999 at Bunkyo University Foundation
- UNITWIN-UNESCO/KU/ICL Landslides Risk Mitigation for Society and Environment Cooperation Programme at Kyoto University, established in 2003 at Kyoto University
- UNITWIN Network on emergency preparedness and responses, established in 2005 at Waseda University
- UNESCO Chair on Cultural Heritage and Risk Management, established in 2006 at Ritsumeikan University, Research Center for Disaster Mitigation of Urban Cultural Heritage
- UNESCO Chair in Research and Education for Sustainable Development, established in 2007 at the Okayama University

The proposed UNESCO Chair at Okayama University relies upon the cooperation between formal and non-formal education for building sustainable societies in Okayama and on a global level. The Chair integrates both local knowledge in Okayama and those from the international community. The chair also strives to spread the conception of ESD and put in practice ESD activities in Japan and the Asia-Pacific region, realizing sustainable development through inter-university cooperation.

The main activities are summarized as follows:

- 1) Cultivate experts who will work for international agencies and the United Nations agencies in the field of the environment, and will contribute to creating a sustainable society globally.
- 2) Foster the development of experts who will be engaged in activities to create an appropriate environment for realizing a sustainable society at the local level.
- 3) Reorient the curriculum of Okayama University to contribute to create a sustainable society locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

- 4) Undertake practical education to transfer technology and knowledge related to environment conservation for students and experts from developing countries through inter-university cooperation.

5. The NGO Summit 2007 “Kominkan Summit in Okayama”

At the time of the Johannesburg Summit in 2002, the Japanese Government and NGOs made a proposal for the promotion of ESD out of concern that concrete efforts of disseminating and advocating the understanding of “sustainable development” in all communities of the world is urgently needed.

Kominkan, a type of community center in Japan, provides opportunities for lifelong education in local communities. Kominkans are established within local administrative units and are administrated by local Boards of Education under the 1949 Social Education Acts. Of the approximately 3,000 municipalities in Japan in 2002, 91% maintain one or more Kominkan, with a total of about 18,000 throughout the country.

Kominkans in Okayama City are now being engaged in ESD efforts and play important roles in disseminating activities to the whole community. They are also expected to foster human resources to make the community sustainable.

The UNESCO Chair at Okayama University and COINN organized an international conference entitled “Kominkan Summit in Okayama – Community Development and Promotion of Education for Sustainable Development –” in collaboration with UNESCO Bangkok, which promotes Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in the Asia-Pacific region. The Summit aimed at promoting ESD through Kominkan as well as utilizing the experiences and lessons of Kominkans to the capacity development of staff in CLCs for their management.

The Kominkan Summit in Okayama was held at Okayama University, Kyoyama Kominkan in Okayama City and Shiraishi Kominkan in Kasaoka City during 27 October to 3 November 2007 with the following prospects:

- Reevaluation of the role of Kominkan in Japan made both from inside and outside Japan.
- ESD promotion initiatives made in Okayama can serve as a model for other regions in Japan and abroad.
- Participating NGO representatives and specialists can recognize and learn about what others are doing for the community development in each of their respective regions.
- Possibility of making Kominkans as regional centers for international contribution by the people of Okayama Prefecture, as stipulated in the Okayama Prefectural Regulations on International Contribution. (e.g. Sister Kominkan Arrangement)
- Making the environmental education and ESD for undergraduate and graduate school students some social models in using those social educational facilities such as Kominkans.

As illustrated in Fig.4, the participants issued a declarative statement entitled “Okayama Declaration on the Roles of Kominkan/CLC in Community Development and Promotion of Education for Sustainable Development” as an outcome of the Summit on 1 November 2007.

**Okayama Declaration on the Roles of Kominkan/CLC in Community
Development and Promotion of Education for Sustainable Development
(ESD)**

(Okayama Declaration)

Promotion of Education for Sustainable Development is a global commitment under the United Nations Decade for ESD (UNDESD). Kominkan Summit in Okayama – Community Development and Promoting ESD - was convened by Okayama University and the Conference of Okayama International NGO Network (COINN), co-organized by UNESCO, Asia/Pacific Cultural Centre for UNESCO (ACCU), in Okayama from 27 October to 3 November 2007, and was participated by experts from government, NGO, and educational/research institutions, of Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Mongolia, Nepal, Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam.

Based on shared experiences with each other and observed ESD activities centered around Kominkan, we agreed that the roles and functions of Kominkan in Japan and CLC in many Asia/Pacific countries are similar though the activities in some cases may look different reflecting the variety of social, economic, historical and geographical circumstances.

Kominkan/CLC can play the role of community based institution, with active participation and ownership by the community, creating lifelong learning opportunities for all people meeting their present and future diverse needs. Kominkan/CLC can function as information and learning centre and facilitate group activities for community development, for better behavioral changes towards a sustainable future. Kominkan/CLC also has a role to establish linkages among community people, among Kominkan/CLC and with other stakeholders.

Stakeholders concerned with sustainable development can make ESD living philosophy to support and promote the emerging roles of Kominkan/CLC. Government can develop policies and mobilize resources while NGOs/civil society can work as catalysts at the community. Academic institutions like schools and universities can provide technical assistance through research and/or participation in Kominkan/CLC activities. Private sectors also have important role in this regard. Promoting ownership and capacity building of Kominkan/CLC and also all the stakeholders are crucial.

Linkages and networking among the stakeholders should be promoted at all levels. CLC associations and sister CLC movement can be established at international, national, provincial and district levels. Such networking can promote world peace and sustainable community development through collaboration and sharing common themes.

We confirm our commitment in the furtherance of ESD in our respective positions. Also we commit ourselves to spread the learning and shared vision formulated here in Okayama, first in Asia but in the long run to other parts of the world.

We hope that this document would be used by all concerned in advocacy, policy dialogue and further discussions to take place in national and international settings.

November 1, 2007

Participants of Kominkan summit in Okayama

Fig. 4 “Okayama Declaration” issued at the Kominkan Summit in Okayama

6. Concluding Remarks

The NGOs in Okayama started substantial activities for international cooperation in 1994, when the Okayama Topia for International Contribution (OTIC) was established. Environmental problems and Education have been central themes of NGO Summits organized by OTIC since 1994.

The themes of NGO Summits have shifted to the promotion of ESD since the adoption of Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD) announced at the 57th UN General Assembly in December 2002. The collaboration of local NGOs and the Okayama Municipal Office led to the acknowledgement of the Okayama region as one of the world's first seven RCEs (i.e., Barcelona, Greater Sendai, Okayama, Pacific, Penang, Rhine-Meuse, and Toronto).

The university staff in the Okayama region cooperated privately with local NGOs and local governments for ESD. The establishment of a UNESCO Chair at Okayama University is expected to promote collaboration of higher education institutions (HIEs) and to strengthen the organized activities of HIEs for ESD.

The HEIs have the role of taking leadership to show a new paradigm of development for a sustainable future. They also have a responsibility to enhance the teachers' capacity at primary and secondary schools and non-formal educational settings. The Okayama ESD Workshop 2005 entitled "Cooperation between Formal and Non-formal Education" summarized the challenging tasks facing HEIs:

"It should be emphasized that Higher Education Institutions have broad and crucial roles for cooperation. HEIs should play roles in providing models of knowledge necessary for a sustainable society. ESD is not only intended to incorporate the concept of sustainability to universities' curriculums but also to apply it to all activities within their campus and collaborative ones with the communities to realize sustainability."

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