

The RCA Scientific Forum: Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of RCA Establishment

In his opening remarks, Dr. Chung-Won Cho expressed the hope that the speakers would give guidance on the further development of the RCA to tackle the new challenges that would be faced in the future.

Mr. Qian Jihui emphasized the progress that RCA Member States had made since the regional agreement started. He noted the RCA's efforts to meet the challenges the region was facing using nuclear technology for peaceful purposes. He also mentioned that the alleviation of poverty through sustainable development was a concern of the international community, including IAEA. He encouraged the RCA, in the future, to find ways to give added value to their projects based on past experiences. In concluding his remarks, he said he was certain of optimistic prospects for future cooperation among the RCA Member States.

5.1 'The Legend of the RCA' by Mr. A.K. Anand

Mr. Anand presented a history of the RCA technical cooperation programme over the past 30 years, dividing it into three stages. The experience and achievements from implementing the RCA activities had been well recognized by the Agency. During the first 25 years of the RCA, about 275 meetings were organized and about 65 projects undertaken. He observed that there were no research reactors related projects until 1996.

He presented statistics showing the increase in the RCA activities. He gave examples in the different areas: Agriculture, Health, Industry, Environment, Energy/Research Reactor/Waste Management, Radiation Protection and General TCDC. He cited examples of projects using nuclear applications in agriculture in China and India where population is huge and their dependency on agriculture is high. The impact of UMMBs in Asian countries was analyzed. (Annex 29).

5.2 'Serving for Human Needs' by Prof. Naiyyum Choudhury

Prof. Choudhury made a presentation entitled "Nuclear Technology for Clean Drinking Water". He said that the supply of fresh water could not meet the needs of growing population especially in developing countries. He described the situation in Bangladesh as alarming and added that, to make things worse, the presence of arsenic in drinking water posed even greater threats to health. To meet such threats, he noted that isotope techniques had been successfully used for groundwater assessment, monitoring of water flow, and evaluation of the contamination of water resources.

He informed the meeting that Bangladesh was initiating water projects with the help of World Bank and IAEA. He cited the importance of fresh water placed by the Rio Conference

on Environment and Development, which had put emphasis on the protection of the quality and the supply of clean water. Before concluding his presentation, he highlighted the importance of clean water supply in connection with sustainable development and poverty reduction. (Annex 30)

5.3 ‘New Challenges with Nuclear Techniques’ by Dr. Sueo Machi

Dr. Machi detailed examples of radiation technology being used in environmental protection and in nuclear applications in agriculture with reference to projects in Japan, Malaysia and Viet Nam. He also discussed radiation therapy techniques for the treatment of cancer. In conclusion, he emphasized that new nuclear technologies would contribute to sustainable development. (Annex 31)

5.4 ‘For a better Partnership’ by Dr. John Easey

Dr. Easey proposed that a strategic approach was needed to handle major issues in the future for RCA. Since funding resources were expected to be limited, finding the most effective means to achieve the RCA programme goals was needed. He suggested that a paradigm shift was necessary to change the image from the IAEA’s RCA to Member States’ RCA. Possible funding options for the RCA programme were presented. He proposed that carefully focused awareness campaigns on the RCA could be a means to expand the RCA’s activities. He concluded that RCA’s future lay in the strength of the Regional Cooperation. (Annex 32)

5.5. Wrap-up: ‘Toward a Viable Economic Development’ by Prof. Byong-Whi Lee

Prof. Lee noted that, based on his experience from the evaluation of IAEA/RCA/UNDP, the issues to improve the benefits from radioisotope and radiation applications for viable economic development were project design, project management and project operation. He also stressed that future strategies for improving these benefits should focus on giving assistance to small and medium size industries in improving their productivity and product quality, giving priority to tackle environmental problems and addressing the need to upgrade transport infrastructure of the region. (Annex 33)

After presentation, the following comments were made;

Dr. Easey mentioned that both the Member States and the Agency had a responsibility to improve the RCA programme and gave examples of problems observed in the training area. He also suggested that the region needed more experience in the technical management of projects.

Dr. Machi urged those involved in the use of application of nuclear energy or nuclear power to communicate more with others and do it more effectively. He criticized the Agency for not providing a high level of information on the advantages of nuclear energy.

Mr. Razley admitted that the Agency was not doing very well to communicate the benefits of nuclear energy. He related the recent Agency's experience with CNN and BBC as examples of communicating with the media.

On the paper of Prof. Lee, Mr. Aleta, RCA Coordinator commented that the Agency had gradually been improving the project design through the application of model project criteria.

Prof. Choudhury recalled that there has been a change in the policies of the Agency regarding project design, project management monitoring and evaluation. A manual had been developed for TC project Planning and Design in collaboration with US Argonne Laboratory and it included the use of a logical framework matrix. He agreed that all projects had to fulfill the project criteria in order to be approved. He noted that training policy has also changed recently and that the selection of trainees was more rigorous than in the past.

Prof. Lee commented that a current major challenge was how to harness new nuclear technology for sustainable development. He said he was worried that the UNDP funding was not available now. He agreed that projects should be mission oriented and suggested that the Agency should seek additional funding and also assist in the sustainable supply of qualified manpower. He said it was most important for RCA activities to be sustainable.

Dr. Easey mentioned that funding from donors had essentially plateaued and that the staffing level in international agencies was also static. The RCA had valuable skills, skilled manpower and active regional and national networks should be able to go out and exploit this situation and through it earn money which could be used to fund other RCA projects or priorities.