



Tuesday, February 20, 2018

The University of Fiji Hosts Commonwealth Youth Forum



The Commonwealth Student Association Members with attendees at the Commonwealth Youth Forum.

Brief Overview

The Commonwealth Secretariat identified Fiji as an appropriate place to hold the Commonwealth Ministers’ meeting. From this emanated the Commonwealth Youth Forum, which The University of Fiji hosted on Tuesday, February 20, 2018.

The Commonwealth Youth Section is a sub-division of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The Commonwealth Secretariat, established in 1965, is home to over 2.4 billion people in 53 different countries. Member countries of the Commonwealth are assisted by over 80 Non-Governmental Organisations and societies.

The Commonwealth Secretariat launched the Youth Consortium at the 9th Commonwealth Youth Ministers’ Meeting in August, 2017 at Kampala, Uganda. 20 Educational institutions are part of the youth consortium.

The Commonwealth Secretariat in partnership with Commonwealth of Learning and the University of West Indies created modules to be shared amongst members of the consortium to further youth work education in the Commonwealth.

The Youth Consortium is a University consortium of youth providing youth work education to youngsters.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Prem Misir, attended Commonwealth Youth Section Meeting and The Association of Commonwealth Universities on September 28, 2017, in London, United Kingdom.

The meeting resulted in various outcomes for The University of Fiji including, hosting the Commonwealth Youth Forum.

The Youth Forum was also attended by the Honourable Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum, Chair of the Commonwealth Students Associations, Ms. Maisha Reza, Mr. Mark Albon, representative from the Commonwealth Secretariat as well as Commonwealth Youth Section members.

The Forum was divided into three sessions: Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship, Non-Formal Education and Student Governance/Participation. The discussions that took place were on educations, its importance to youth, accessibility of quality education, employability after graduation and the development of a knowledge-based society.

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The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Prem Misir, with Head of Programmes, Youth Division, Mr. Layne Robinson and Assistant Programme Officer (Pacific) Ms. Sionlelei Mario at the Commonwealth Secretariat in London.

The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Prem Misir's Keynote Address



The Vice-Chancellor, Professor Prem Misir, delivering the Keynote Address at the Commonwealth Youth Forum.

While speaking to the Commonwealth Youth Section in London, from which resulted the Commonwealth Youth Forum, Vice-Chancellor, Professor Misir, explained that in a society like Fiji with a youth bulge, there may be issues that youth may face and it is good to have youth with youth work qualifications to talk and relate to them. He further stated that upon becoming a member of the Youth Consortium, UniFiji will be able to teach youth work qualifications from the modules at zero cost to the University.

Professor Misir, the Keynote Speaker at the Forum, highlighted youth and student engagement, non-formal education, accessibility and employability. The following was his message to attendees of the Youth Forum:

“Today, the world has the highest number of young people on planet earth than at any other time in recorded history, clearly the ingredients for unparalleled economic and social progress. But this progress seems to have an attribute of sustained elusiveness.

Today The University of Fiji has an engagement with the young people of the Commonwealth. But first what do we mean when we use the term ‘youth’?

I suspect that we could conceive of youth as, where childhood is left behind and the foundational years in the age group 15- 29 (640 million) extend into the future. As a youth, you are not a child, yet you are not a full adult. And so, it was timely then in 1973 to establish the Commonwealth Youth Program.

This is the Commonwealth Youth Forum, a spinoff from the current Council of Commonwealth Education Ministers’ Meeting in Fiji. Essentially, both the Forum and the Education Ministers’ meeting

attempt to fulfill the values and aspirations of the Commonwealth Charter. And you may know that the Commonwealth comprises 53 diverse nations and in excess of 80 organizations. 39 of the 53 nations are small and vulnerable. 2.4 billion people, about a third of the global population. 60% of this population is under age 30. In fact, at this time, there are 1.8 billion youth population between the ages of 10 and 24; 90% live in commonwealth countries; and 1 in 3 live in less developed countries. Indeed, ASIA-Pacific with 29%, South Asia with 26%, and Sub-Saharan Africa with 15% has the largest global youth populations. Actually, about 87% of young people live in developing countries. Undoubtedly, young people are a formidable force on the global stage, where many may not have the wherewithal to forge a better world environment partly because some countries experience demographic dividend and others do not. Demographic dividend may happen when a population changes from a situation of many dependents and relatively few working-age people to a situation of many working-age people with fewer dependents.

Many of these young people have no jobs, especially in developing nations, which continue to increase its graduates with poor prospects of active employment. Accompanying this sustained youth unemployment in large parts of the developing world also is that this generation of youth remains trapped in an insecure and unpredictable global environment, a situation for which adults must bear moral responsibility for its creation.

But the young people globally should not become despondent with this ugliness that penetrates their lives. Young people can rise to the occasion to remove this uncertainty to make this world a better place.

Two sayings from Rabindranath Tagore

provide some insights on how to see the current painful global environment that young people inhabit: “Today’s youth is tomorrow’s future.”

Shake off the old and diseased, unleash your endless spirit,” (Tagore).

Young people must create an age of charity and kindness and pursue its reinforcement. The production of this age of humanity is a necessity and of utmost urgency, as some of your other folks, the older ones, continue to abuse the world with extreme violence and ethno-religious conflicts. And so if the world needs this caring age, it is now. And the youth can transform this caring philosophy into practice through the rubric of the sustainable development goals and the Commonwealth Charter.

In 2013, the The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and United Nations International Children’s Education Fund (UNICEF) presented sustainable development, thus: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Implicit in this definition is the idea that in order to meet the social and economic needs of people today and in the future, there must be continued efforts towards poverty eradication, human rights, and equity, as well as sustainable consumption and protection of our natural resources” (UNFPA, 2010; UNICEF, 2013).

Given that nearly 50% of the world is under age 30, young people are the most pivotal to be the accountability hub for the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 targets. Five Ps capture the spirit and essence of these SDGs: People, Planet, Peace, Prosperity, and Partnerships. And since young people really are assets for national development, they can certainly play an active role in implementing these new people-centred, people-led accountability mechanisms, in order to realize the SDGs 2030 agenda. Specifically, young people can be part of the follow-up, review, and accountability framework, only if young people experience empowerment to hold governments and duty-bearers accountable, a vital channel of execution for the SDG agenda that “leaves no one behind”.

But in order for this empowerment to succeed, first we must review the current-baseline conditions of young people.

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Based on the Youth Development Index Report of 2016, young people made substantial progress in civic engagement, that is, stronger interface with communities; and there was increased progress in access to education.

At the same time, the Youth Development Index Report of 2016 noted stark gaps in youth development, thus:

- About 75% of the global youth populations are residing in countries with a low to medium level of youth development, where countries do not have the capacity to provide adequately for their young people.

- Gaps in countries with low to high youth development are evident in education, health services, financial inclusion, and digital technology; in these situations, females are at a disadvantage compared to their male peers.

- Countries high on youth development did not do well on drug abuse and mental disorder, when compared to countries low on youth development.

- In all countries, young people are two times likely to be unemployed compared to adults, notwithstanding they are more educated and qualified than their parents' generation.

- Youth development is lethargic in countries with a large youth population; and about 25% of the youth population comes from developing countries; producing a large disaffected young population, ingredients for instability.

- Youth are also victims of violent crimes and conflict in a uneven way - worldwide.

Such unadulterated fissures in youth development require immediate and sustainable solutions, if youth empowerment is ever going to become a reality.

And so, accomplishing the SDG 2030 agenda requires the institution of a knowledge-based economy, which, in turn, necessitates a good match of graduates into employment positions. But the situation facing young people now suggests that there are mismatches between young people's skills and those that employers want; absence of labour market information; and reduced access to financial and other business services.

Some corrective measures which must come from tertiary education, should include:

- Identifying factors producing work-readiness graduates;

- Developing graduate attributes instrumental for honing employability skills; and

- Facilitating employability and learning through learning outcomes.

Young people need to be more active and pro-active in critically reviewing learning outcomes in tertiary education, in order to ensure that their education, both formal and non-formal, leads to the application of feasible learning outcomes, and to make certain that this education facilitates their empowerment.

Here are some examples of learning outcomes in, say, a course outline in tertiary education:

- The degree program provided up-to-date knowledge;

- The degree program developed my capability to use ideas and information;

- The degree program developed my ability to test ideas and evidence;

- The degree program gave me the ability to generate new ideas and evidence;

- The degree program enabled personal development; and

- The degree program developed my capacity to plan and manage self-learning” (Sumanasiri, Erabaddage Gishan Tharanga; Yajid, Mohd Shukri Ab; Khatibi, Ali. 2015).

Young people in tertiary education must become watchdogs of their learning outcomes.

If young people as graduates have employability, then they have the capacity to secure a satisfying job.

There is no question that the SDG agenda 2030 will go nowhere without the growth of a knowledge society. And again, this growth requires young people from diverse backgrounds to have access to tertiary education. Their accessibility may be problematic in many parts of the Commonwealth. Again, there is no question that access to knowledge supports every societal objective in a democracy. And perhaps, too, access to knowledge should inform any reconceptualization of higher education.

Sometimes in the drive to enhance accessibility, there is a debate between equity and excellence – educate a small number of people, but with higher standards; or increase access to education and perhaps accepting a lower performance standard.

The connection between equity and excellence is a zero-sum trade-off between these two situations. A new model of tertiary education must present equity to mean that all academically qualified persons,

including poor students, or those students in rural or remote areas, or students from particular ethnic or linguistic minorities, should have a chance for admission, irrespective of their socio-economic status (SES).

Nevertheless, school knowledge is only part of the process to transition to a successful adult life; there is need, too, for non-formal education; also, there is need for job-competitive skills, and to embrace a high-tech world as digital natives with appropriate digital literacy or e-kills.

At the moment in many parts of the developing world, there is a global crisis of deteriorating youth unemployment, even as young people clamour for decent work. And possibly, the work of youth organizations as an example of non-formal education, may address this issue of sustained youth unemployment.

Youth organisations and employability (YOE) database with data from about 1000 young people in 40 European countries addressed the outcomes of involvement in youth organisations.

The analysis indicates that the kinds of the involvement in youth organisations are better predictors of outcomes on employability than are personal attributes of young people. Policy implications demand better policy support to boost opportunities for the participation of young people from lower SES in youth organisations and for advising young people of the advantages of sustained participation with youth organisations.

Tertiary education must embrace formal, informal, and non-formal education.

The fulfillment of this idea requires the pursuit of interdisciplinarity.

Tagore captures this insight so well, thus: “The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence,” (Tagore).

After all the rhetoric to engage youth in this new mantle of leadership, the end-goal is their empowerment, if they are to play any role in shaping and changing this insecure and unpredictable global environment, to construct and, perhaps, reconstruct a better world for all.”

Student Voices Pivotal- Honourable Sayed-Khaiyum



Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum delivering his speech.

Speaking at the Forum, Minister of Education, Heritage and Arts, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum stated that student bodies need to maintain a certain level of impartiality to be able to speak independently as a critical voice on various subjects.

“The moment the impartiality is compromised by any student organisation, the ability to speak on a whole range of issues will be compromised. Then you can truly become an independent voice and a critic of policies and various issues taking place in your country and even in the education sector,” he stated.

The Honourable Minister also spoke about the recent Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme (YES), which made funds available to young entrepreneurs.

“As graduates, we should not look at ourselves as job seekers. You also need to be job creators,” he stated.

The Forum centered on the topic of education, its importance to youth, accessibility of quality education, employability after graduation and the development of a knowledge-based society.

Tertiary education must embrace formal, informal, and non-formal education - Professor Misir



The Vice-Chancellor Prof. Prem Misir with Elisha Elisha Oheneba Essumang, President - National Union of Ghana Students.

Tertiary education must embrace formal, informal, and non-formal education says the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Prem Misir.

As the Keynote Speaker at the Commonwealth Youth Forum, Professor Misir while explaining the importance of embracing the various types of education stated that the fulfillment of this idea requires the pursuit of interdisciplinarity.

“After all the rhetoric to engage youth in this new mantle of leadership, the end-goal is their empowerment, if they are to play any role in shaping and changing this insecure and unpredictable global environment, to construct and, perhaps, reconstruct a better world for all,” he explained.

At the second session of the Commonwealth Youth Forum, Dr. Tim Corney, Professor of Education at the University of Victoria and the University of Melbourne, Australia, commented that there was a vast difference between formal, informal and non-formal education however the benefits of incorporating all into education will eventuate in a lifelong learning process.



Mr. Mark Alborn delivering his speech.

Mr. Mark Alborn, representative from the Commonwealth Secretariat spoke on education being one of the fundamental tools to countering violent extremism.

He stressed that some of the aspects such as tolerance, good governance and a sense of community and society that builds a sense of inclusion is present in the informal and non-formal education process hence education is a vital tool to counter violent extremism.

Sessions at Commonwealth Youth Forum

The Forum was divided into three sessions: Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship, Non-Formal Education and Student Governance/Participation which discussed the topic of educa-

tion, its importance to youth, accessibility of quality education, employability after graduation and the development of a knowledge-based society.

Youth Employability and Entrepreneurship



Session 1 Panelists & Moderator.

The first session hosted three panelists, Mr. Ashutosh Sharma, a young entrepreneur from New Zealand, Mr. Nesbitt Hazelman, Chief Executive Officer, Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation and Ms. Shomy Chowdhury, Asia Regional Repre-

sentative of the Commonwealth Student Association. The panel discussion was on the topic “The future of work- Is the Education system ready?” Mr. Sharma in his discussion focused on the problem solving mindset in young people and the ability to think outside the box.

Mr. Hazelman spoke on the topic of incorporating non-cognitive skills into teaching and producing work-ready graduates while, Ms. Chowdhury spoke on the importance of instilling the idea of being job creators than job seekers by teaching entrepreneurial skills from a young age. There were various questions raised about adopting or changing the education system to cater for the changing corporate sector, producing work-ready graduates with non-cognitive skills, changing methods of teaching as well as the part that corporate sector can play in helping create work-ready graduates. The outcomes of the discussions from the session were captured and would be fed into the Integrated Partners Forum that was held at Sheraton Resort from February 19 to 23, 2018.

Non-Formal and Informal Education



Dr. Tim Corney addressing the attendees on the informal and formal education.

The second session hosted two speakers, Dr. Tim Corney, Professor of Education at the University of Victoria and the University

of Melbourne, Australia, and Mr. Mark Alborn, representative from the Commonwealth Secretariat who spoke on the topic “Importance of non-formal and informal education to lifelong learning”. Dr. Corney spoke about the difference between formal, informal and non-formal education as the benefits of incorporating all in a lifelong learning process.

Mr. Alborn spoke on education being one of the fundamental tools to countering violent extremism. He stressed that some of the aspects such as tolerance, good governance and a sense of community and society that builds a sense of inclusion is present in the informal and non-formal education process hence education is a vital tool to counter violent extremism. The discussions were noted and will be conveyed to the Education Ministers’ which will help in developing policies regarding informal and non-formal education.

Importance of Student Governance/Participation



Mr. Odayne Houghton and Mr. George Njoroge addressing the attendees about Commonwealth Student Association.

Session three was conducted by the Commonwealth Students Association (CSA) where a report was presented indicating that many countries in the Commonwealth did not have a National Student Body.

The group highlighted that a National Student Body was essential to enable students to raise their concerns and voice their opinions not only on National matters but regional and even global matters.

There were many questions regarding how to establish a National Body and various suggestions were made and noted that could be included by the CSA in the CCEM (Conference of the Commonwealth Education Ministers).

Young people must become watchdogs of learning outcomes: Professor Misir



Professor Misir giving his Keynote Address.

Keynote Speaker at the Forum, the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Prem Misir highlighted that young people are critical in achieving a knowledge-based society; a knowledge-based society which in turn resuscitates a good match of graduates into employment positions.

“Some of the corrective measures we take must take come from tertiary education and it should include identifying factors producing work-ready graduates, develop graduate attributes instrumental for holding employability skills, facilitate employability and learning through learn-

ing outcomes which is the key to bring change in the University,” he stated.

Further to his point, he stressed that learning outcomes is the key to bring change in the University.

“Young people need to become watchdogs of the learning outcomes of the course outlines. They need to be more active and proactive to critically review the learning outcomes. The learning outcomes need to be practical, relating to employability skills and it has to be measurable,” he explained.

In addition, Professor Misir stated that a knowledge society and its growth requires young people from diverse backgrounds to have access to tertiary education.

“We must ensure that we have tertiary education that ensures young people some level of empowerment. We must look at tertiary education and re-conceptualize the concept of tertiary education,” he concluded.

Businesses focus on Entrepreneur Mindset - Sharma



Ashutosh Sharma speaking in IT and his experience as an entrepreneur.

Ashutosh Sharma, a young entrepreneur from New Zealand and one of the panelists in session one of the Commonwealth Youth Forum themed “The future of work - Is the Education system ready?” hosted at The University of Fiji, said that employers as well as businesses were looking for entrepreneur mindset and

problem solving skills in their potential employees.

He stated that the education system around the world focused on what is the right and wrong answer instead of focusing on why it is the right or wrong answer.

“Organisations are now looking at people who could be problems solvers solving real world problems. The world is full of opportunities,” he explained.

Elaborating on his point, he commented that failure was a part of success and people need to keep trying despite the hurdle.

“I started my first business at the age of 13. It failed. I have worked on various applications and many of my applications failed.

I have faced a lot of rejections but I took part in Microsoft Imagine Cup Competition and got exposure and then I was offered a job at New Zealand’s largest software company. The Fijian Government funded YES (Youth Entrepreneurship Scheme) is a very good starting point for people to enter into competitions to get exposure,” he stated.

Mr. Sharma advised the attendees not to lose hope but to always be passionate about what they do. Being passionate about work, he said, will make a person try harder to do his best and succeed.

Produce Work-Ready Graduates

Mr. Nesbitt Hazelman, the Chief Executive Officer, Fiji Commerce and Employers Federation, while speaking at the first session of the Commonwealth Youth Forum, stated that Universities need to focus on producing work-ready graduates.

In his presentation, Mr. Hazelman highlighted the importance of incorporating non-cognitive skills with cognitive skills in the learning process to produce work-ready graduates.

“Education organisations need to provide a holistic environment for learning. It’s not only the cognitive skills that we need, it’s the non-cognitive skills that need to be addressed such as linking theory to practice as well as productivity in the workforce,” he stressed.

He further stated that the employers were facing various problems.

“We are now facing with the millennials. They want long holidays, they want to travel, and they want to work from home. This is the modern student of today or the modern worker. They (employers) are trying to design the work around those areas,” he explained.

Mr. Kogo Fujiki, Australian student representative of the Commonwealth Youth Forum, asked Mr. Hazelman on the steps that the private sector was taking in order to assist incorporate non-



Mr. Nesbitt Hazelman delivering his speech.

cognitive skills in the education system and how these could be achieved.

Answering the question, Mr. Hazelman stated that private sectors could be more involved in the education process to voice out the needs of the private sector from students.

Mr. Ashutosh Sharma, a young entrepreneur from New Zealand and Ms. Shomi Hassan Choudhry, Asia Regional Representative of the Commonwealth Student Association were the co-panelists of the session.

Ministry of Youth and Sports Participate in the Commonwealth Youth Forum



UniFiji Attendees at the Forum.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports coordinators were amongst the participants of the Commonwealth Youth Forum hosted at UniFiji, Saweni Campus.

Speaking about the Forum, Mr. Laisiasa Corerega, Senior Coordinator at the Ministry of Youth and Sports said that the Ministry was appreciative of The University of Fiji for taking the initia-

tive and hosting the Youth Forum, the first ever Commonwealth Youth Forum.

“The Forum was a tremendous success as it achieved the objectives intended by the Forum. It was indeed great to have speakers from external stakeholders and the Minister for Education and Attorney General, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum,” he commented.

At the Forum, the Commonwealth Student Association members highlighted the need to have a National Student Body which will discuss the national and regional student affairs.

On this note, Mr. Corerega stated that Fiji indeed needs a Student Body to represent the whole region at the Commonwealth, however it needs to be done in a democratic process.

During the Commonwealth Youth Forum, various issues were raised with regards to the youth. Mr. Corerega explained that the issues raised in Forum will be used to make amendments to the draft Youth Policy.

“Ministry of Youth and Sports has a Draft National Youth Policy in review. It has contextualized the issues raised. Moreover, it is captured in the Ministry’s Strategic Plan 2017-22,” he concluded.

The Ministry of Youth and Sports is in the process of preparing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts to develop Youths in Fiji.

Student Bodies in the Commonwealth



Mr. Odayne Haughton speaking on Commonwealth Student Association.

The third session of the Commonwealth Youth Forum focused on “Student Governance/participation”. The session was hosted and moderated by the Commonwealth Student Association.

The session discussed the role of students in development especially in the education sector, as well as the importance of having National Student Bodies.

The National Student Bodies would incorporate the Universities and well as the Secondary and Primary Schools.

Speaking at the session Mr. Odayne Haughton, former Officio Member, addressed on a report carried out by the Commonwealth Students Association (CSA) that highlighted that various countries in the Commonwealth did not have National Student Bodies.

He explained that the National Student Bodies/organisations (NSOs) were instru-

mental in raising student issues.

“NSO will be seen as active partners responding shaping education and policy at government, sector/agency and institutional levels. Before students weren’t really involved but we have realized that the dynamics changed so we are trying to involved more students into the development and policy making arena,” he commented.

He further stated that the CSA realized that the major issue faced by the NSOs was inadequate resources and support hence the Association also provided capacity building to NSOs.

Ministry of Youth and Sports Senior Coordinator, Mr. Laisiasa Corerega, confirmed that there was a need for a National Student Body but one which would be elected through a democratic process.

RANDOM SHOTS



UniFiji Student Association President, Mr. Anusek Kumar with the Ghana Student Association Members.



Commonwealth Student Association President, Dr. Maisha Reza with members Mr. Odayne Haughton and Mr. George Njoroge.



University of the South Pacific Student attendees at the Commonwealth Youth Forum.



Professor Prem Misir addressing the attendees at the Commonwealth Youth Forum.



Session One Penalists and Moderator with the Attorney General, Honourable Aiyaz Sayed-Khaiyum. Source: Fijian Government Facebook Page.



The University of Fiji student attendees at the Commonwealth Youth Forum. Source: Fijian Government Facebook Page.

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